

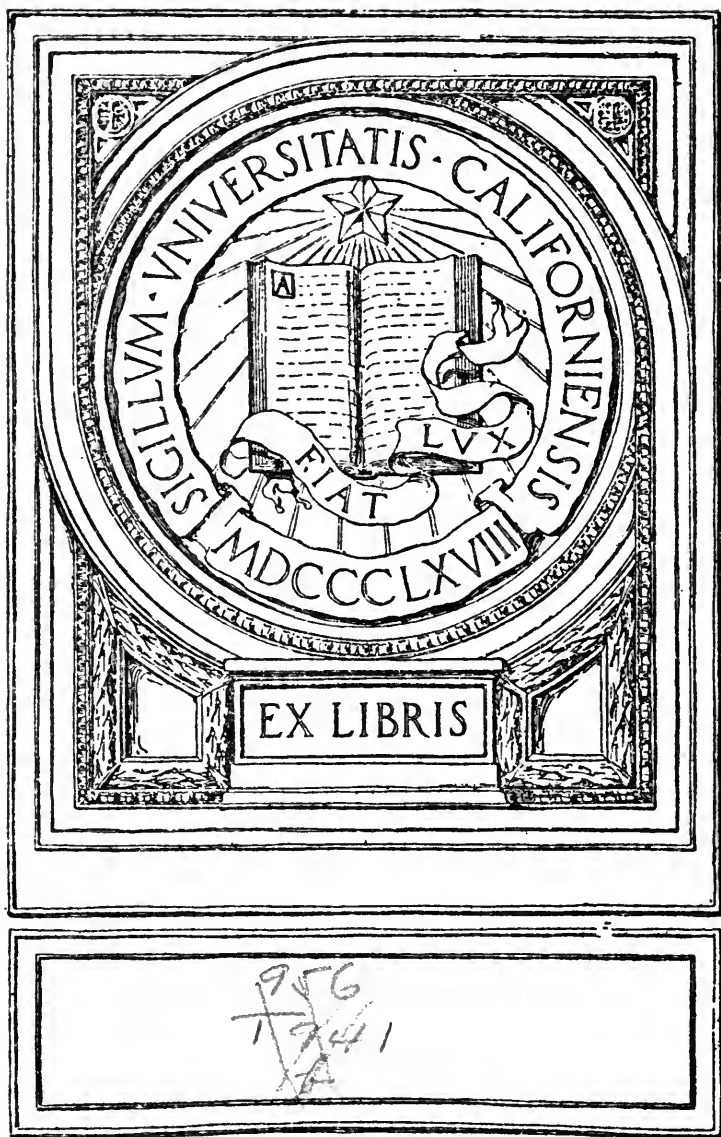
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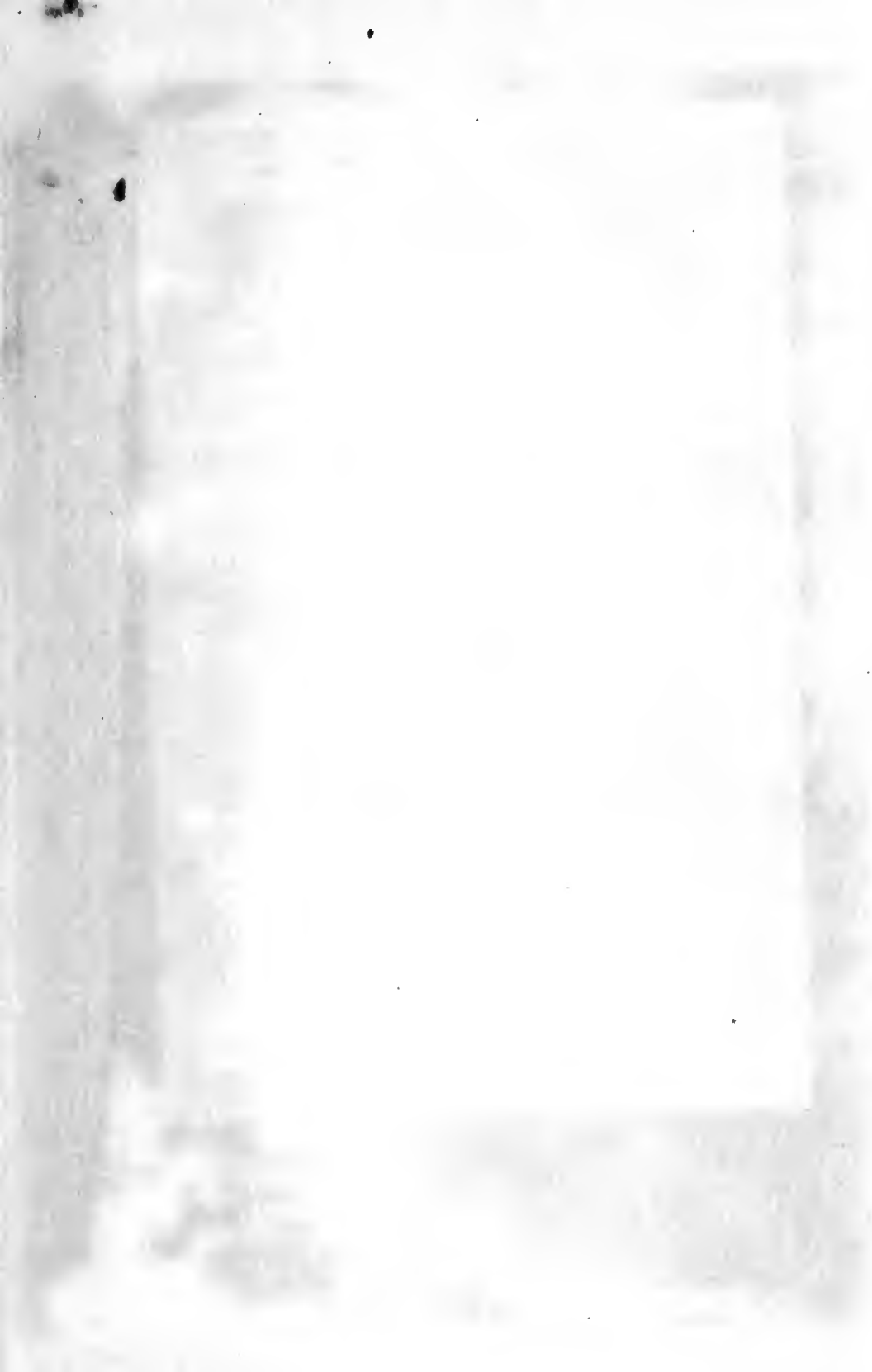


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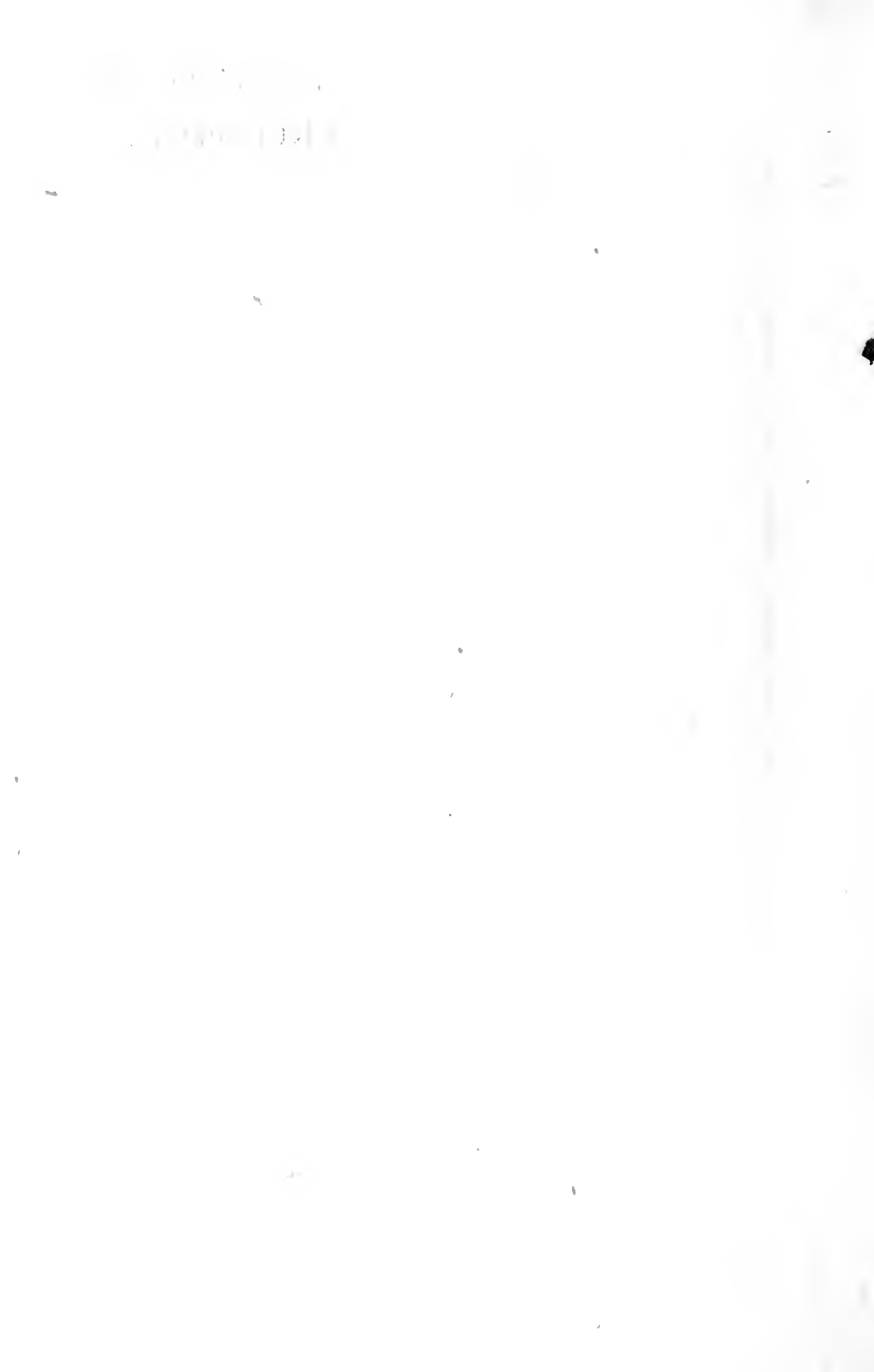
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A BAND OF
BROTHERS.



A BAND OF BROTHERS

BY
CHARLES TURLEY



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BOOK I
THE FOOL OF THE FAMILY



A BAND OF BROTHERS

CHAPTER I

THE RUMBOLDS

JOE RUMBOLD was born about two hundred years after Granby was founded, and the only grievance that his family had against this famous school was that it did not owe its foundation to a Rumbold. King was the name of the man who did found Granby, and if the Rumbolds could have traced descent from him they might have been more inclined to reverence his 'pious memory.'

As it was, they were disposed to think that Mr. King—whose portrait hangs in the great Granby library—was a man who had obtained an honour which ought in justice to have belonged to them.

Even Joe's father, who liked to spend idle moments in deploring the disrespectful way in which school-boys spoke of their elders and betters, set his sons a very bad example by referring to Mr. King as 'that silly-looking old buffer who had the luck to stumble on a good thing, but had not sense enough to appreciate it.' Mr. Rumbold never gave reasons, he

just made statements. No one, however, who was not stone-deaf and also endowed with a marvellous digestion, could stay for two hours at Maiden Croft without discovering that the Rumbolds were Granbeians to the core. Their jokes had the Granbeian flavour, and they frequently ate a pudding called Granby Stodge, which was offered to guests as a sort of test of their worth.

There was a Rumbold, a bachelor some thirty years old and known in the family as Cousin William, who dared to scoff at Granby, and was neither saturated in its traditions, nor prepared to admit that it was the finest school in the world. In a less squeamish age his relations would have thought him a heretic fit for the stake, but living at a time when burning was out of fashion they pitied him for his lack of intelligence, and despised him for his lack of loyalty. All of which was, perhaps, harmless enough in its way, although it may also have been a little trying for those unfortunate men who happened to have been educated at other schools.

Joe's great-grandfather had been at Granby, his grandfather was there (but as regards this Rumbold there was a vulgar report that he had been prouder of Granby than Granby had been of him), and his father had spent six years at the school, and did not depart from it until he had reached the mature age of twenty. Even then he was disinclined to leave, but as he was already engaged to be married the authorities of Granby reluctantly wished him farewell.

But it is the generation of Rumbold to which Joe belonged which absorbed concentrated Granby essence into its life.

It seems almost unnecessary to recount facts which all good Granbeians know, yet in case there are people so imperfectly informed that they are ignorant of

the history of the Rumbolds, it may be as well to state that Joe was the youngest of five brothers. That in itself is a fact which anyone might be excused for not knowing, but it is very doubtful if all of his brothers would have admitted as much. For it is impossible to think of Granby without remembering how much of its athletic glory is due to the Rumbolds.

His brothers had no Christian names, or, if they had, no one used them. At their home, at Maiden Croft, they were called Flip, Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo. To the outside world, by which is meant that world which takes more interest in games than in things like politics and the navy, they were known as M. R., T. J., N. C., and P. S. (which last initials ought certainly to have been reserved for Joe, since he was born five years after Bingo). At Maiden Croft there was a delightful etiquette to be observed about these forms of address. It would have been quite correct to have asked a gardener if he had seen Mr. Flip or Mr. Bingo, but when it came to Jumpy or Pads the rule was to speak of them as Mr. T. J. or Mr. N. C.

As for Joe, he got a bad start in the Rumbold race, and was treated, if not preferentially, at any rate differently. He was not born when Flip began to startle Granby by his athletic skill, while Jumpy celebrated the day of Joe's birth (and deprived him, so it is said, of the glory of it) by making 137 for his private school.

It was bad luck for Joe that he was born in June, because in the summer his father spent most of his spare time in reading and talking about cricket, and consequently had no leisure to fit his youngest son with nice, masculine Christian names, which, if they were seldom used, would nevertheless have been something to fall back upon. There was an agreement between Mr. and Mrs. Rumbold that he should

choose the names of the boys, while she was to choose those of the girls. A one-sided arrangement, as it turned out, for there were not any girls.

Indeed Joe began as a disappointment because he was not feminine, but although he failed to fulfil expectations, it still seems hard to have called him Jocelyn, and to have left him at that. He has, however, some reason to be thankful, for in a moment of ecstatic enthusiasm Mr. Rumbold suggested that his names should be William Gilbert Grace, and he was only saved from this fate by a strong protest from his mother.

‘Supposing he should not turn out to be a cricketer,’ Mrs. Rumbold said.

‘A Rumbold can’t help being a cricketer; cricket’s bred in their bones,’ was the retort.

‘It seems to me almost as bad as calling him by the name of a battle,’ Mrs. Rumbold remarked.

‘We seem to have used all the best names; call him what you like. Blenheim Rumbold sounds all right.’

Yet in the end it was Mr. Rumbold who fixed upon Jocelyn, and demanded credit for his choice.

At first he was merely called Babs, but when his mother began to call him Jocelyn the spirit of his brothers revolted, and in solemn conclave they decided that his name should be Joe. This was the choice of Flip and Pads, Bingo voting for Quintus, and Jumpy (who never had a vestige of imagination) suggesting Squawks or Squawky.

As usual, Joe’s mother yielded, and no one ever gave way with a better grace. Yet in one respect she managed to break away from the Rumbold traditions, for Joe was not sent to the private school where his brothers in turn had hit and kicked balls with extraordinary accuracy, but to a school on the

East Coast. Known as Joe, and at a school which he was frequently led to suppose was an inferior place, it is true that all of his brothers, except Pads, looked upon him as something very like a freak.

When, however, it came to the supreme question whether he should be sent to Granby or not, his mother's suggestion that he should go to a school near the sea was of no avail. Joe had been entered for Granby when he was seventeen days old, and three days before he had been put down for the M.C.C. And there again he created a Rumbold record, because all of his brothers had been entered for Granby before they were put down for the M.C.C.

It is not too much to say that Mrs. Rumbold was quietly jealous of Granby, and wanted to have one son who did not allow his school to enter quite so intrusively into his home-life. She adored all of her sons, and, as far as she could, she took what Mr. Rumbold admitted to be an 'intelligent interest' in their athletic successes. But those who saw it will never forget the look of astonishment which hovered over the Rumbold dinner-table when Mrs. Rumbold forgot that E. de M. Parfitt, who played full-back for the English Rugby Fifteen and cricket for Derbyshire, was an old Granbeian. Not having been born a Rumbold, much, of course, could be forgiven her, but the pity was that she knew that it was forgiven. 'Never mind, mater, you will know better another time,' dropped not seldom in her ears by Flip or Bingo, left little room for doubt.

She wanted some of her sons to be soldiers or sailors, but professions which did not interfere with games were more to the taste of Joe's father and brothers. Flip had been for several years in the Rumbold office in the City when Joe was old enough to go to Granby; Jumpy was on the Stock Exchange when he was not

on tour with some cricket or football team; Pads had spent two years at Cambridge; and Bingo had just left Granby, and was going up to the college at which Pads was, and Flip and Jumpy had been.

Between them Joe's brothers had already collected eight 'blues,' and Bingo, captain of the last Granby Cricket Eleven, holder of the school record for the mile, and 'one of the cleverest three-quarter backs in England' (the *Sportsman*), was expected to bring the total up to double figures.

The Rumbolds lived about thirty miles from London and about fifteen miles from Granby, and as the day approached on which Joe was to burst upon the school as the last of the Rumbolds, he was intensely conscious of his inability to live up to the family reputation. In his heart of hearts he knew that games were incidents, and not matters of the supremest importance in his life, but he was wise enough not to make such an awful admission.

On the very day, however, before his holidays ended, Maiden Croft was to play a cricket match against an eleven of Old Granbeians. So, whenever Bingo had happened to have a spare quarter of an hour, Joe had found himself in a net, and his brother bowling at a pace which was more alarming than pleasant. Bingo's excuse was that unless he bowled fast he could not bowl straight, but the fact remains that Joe did not want him to bowl at all.

Pads had been playing for the county during most of the holidays, but when he was at home he coached Joe in a manner more useful, because less terrifying, than Bingo's. When Pads talked about Granby and cricket, Joe felt spurred to keep up the Rumbold record. But when Bingo groused at him and said that he was 'no more use than a blind baboon, and never would be,' Joe wanted to know where Bingo had seen

a blind baboon, and what reason he had got for putting on such a lot of 'side'—questions to which Bingo could not listen and be peaceable.

* * * * *

Breakfast at Maiden Croft was usually more of a fast and silent feed than a sociable meal. It began with porridge, which the Rumbolds did not sit down to eat, and then everyone seized a newspaper or a portion of one (Joe's portion was generally the advertisement sheets of the *Daily Telegraph*), and settled solidly to rapid eating.

As a rule Mrs. Rumbold did not attend this orgy, but on the morning on which the Old Granbeians were coming down she appeared, and was received with a chorus of ironical congratulations.

'The one day I haven't got to rush up to town your mother comes to breakfast,' Mr. Rumbold said, with one eye on the *Times*.

'You have only been up to town twice in the last fortnight,' Joe remarked, with that invincible desire for truth which so often creates awkward situations.

'Go on with your breakfast, and don't talk so much,' his father told him.

At that moment Bingo discovered that Joe had left half of his porridge, and began to insist that it should be finished.

'Let him eat what he likes; he is going away to-morrow,' Mrs. Rumbold said.

'"Mummy's darling!"' Bingo exclaimed, and helped himself liberally to kidneys and bacon.

'If Joe doesn't like porridge, he isn't a Rumbold,' the head of the family announced.

'He wants to put on flesh,' Flip declared, and looked at his young brother with critical eyes.

'He's got no more muscle than a haddock,' Bingo asserted.

All of the famous Rumbold brothers had assembled for the cricket match, and their mother's unexpected appearance had upset the silent decorum of breakfast.

'If he makes a run to-day, it will be an accident,' Bingo continued, and then, turning on Joe, he added, 'but don't you go and drop a dozen catches.'

'Let him alone; I've seen you drop absolute "sitters,"' Pads told Bingo, and attention was suddenly switched off Joe and turned on to his mother.

Unaccustomed to the seriousness with which the first meal was attacked, Mrs. Rumbold seemed to think that it was rather an opportunity to take gentle exercise than an occasion to eat furiously. To sit at the table was to bind herself at least to the pretence of eating, for a lack of appetite was a thing not to be tolerated in her family.

'I say, mother, couldn't you sit down for a bit?' Flip asked.

'Three laps to the mile, and you've been round the room three times,' Bingo added.

'If one of you would get your mother something to eat instead of talking so much, we might have a little quiet,' came from behind the Financial Supplement of the *Times*.

Whereupon Flip moved his chair a little, but did not rise from it, Jumpy pretended to be deaf, Bingo got up and sat down again immediately, while Pads and Joe met at the heavily laden sideboard for a consultation.

A telegram from the man who was expected to keep wicket for Maiden Croft, to say that he had got influenza, diverted attention from Mrs. Rumbold's breakfast.

'Who ever heard of anyone having "flu," in September!' Flip exclaimed indignantly.

'That fellow Osborne always was a rotter,' Bingo declared, and stared hard at Joe.

Why he should be considered responsible for Mr. Osborne or his 'flu' Joe could not imagine, but Bingo's stare was a challenge which had got to be accepted. Joe spent many weary hours in struggling to keep up his end against Bingo.

'He was your tutor and not mine, but I'll bet he has got "flu,"' he said emphatically.

'While you are wasting time in quarrelling about Osborne, we ought to be thinking about a wicket-keeper,' Mr. Rumbold protested.

'Joe can keep wicket; he's done it for two years,' Pads said, and Joe gave him a terrific kick under the table. But the kick arrived too late.

'Of course, that's the very thing. This match was really arranged for Joe, just to let the O. G.'s know that we have as good fish in the sea as ever came out of it,' Mr. Rumbold said.

'Shove the squish over here, Lilley,' Bingo said promptly to Joe.

'Why do you call him "Lilley"?' Mrs. Rumbold asked.

'Lilley's the best wicket-keeper in England; it's Bingo's idea of humour,' Pads explained.

'How stupid of me!' Mrs. Rumbold said.

'I believe mother will forget her own name next,' Jumpy remarked.

There was something greatly to admire about Jumpy, for he concentrated the whole of his attention upon the thing which he was doing, and never spoke at meals unless it was absolutely necessary. Now that he had finished eating, he made his one remark and went out of the room.

'Honestly,' Joe began, 'I am a very bad wicket-keep indeed. I've never had any practice against

fast bowling. I have a sore thumb, and I've only stumped one man in two years, and he said he wasn't out.'

For ordinary people this might have been enough, but it made no impression upon the Rumbolds.

'Let me look at your thumb,' Flip commanded.

'A thumb,' Joe said, as he walked slowly round the table, 'is not the sort of thing which looks sore like a finger. A wasp stung me on it.'

'That's not so bad as a bee,' Bingo remarked at once.

'Mine was a particularly ferocious wasp,' Joe found time to say, before Flip, after a very casual inspection, decided that there was nothing the matter with the thumb.

'It ought to have been properly attended to. Why didn't you mention it?' asked Mrs. Rumbold.

'Because I was helping myself to plums off one of the trees which have been put out of bounds,' Joe replied promptly.

'Then it served you right,' his father said, and Joe looked at Bingo to see if he was, by any chance, blushing. But the whole of Bingo's attention had suddenly been bestowed upon the *Sportsman*.

Soon afterwards Joe was fully girt and standing, gloved and padded, while Flip bowled and Bingo pretended to bat. For half an hour the ball occasionally found a resting-place in his hands, but more frequently came into contact with more tender portions of his body. His incompetence as a wicket-keeper was not, however, so obvious to Flip as it was to him, and at the end of the practice he was informed that he had got to keep wicket in the match. And this honour so gravely depressed his spirits, that the first Old Granbeian whom he met asked if he was looking miserable because he was going to Granby

on the following day—to which question Joe answered truthfully, if surprisingly, that he had forgotten all about Granby.

Of the match that had been arranged for Joe there is little to say, except that it was an arrangement which from his point of view was not altogether a success. He did stump one man, but it was a slow performance, and the batsman seemed more anxious to be stumped than Joe was to stump him. And he half caught another man—so his father said, and he was one of the umpires—who had captained England. That possibly ought to have encouraged him, but unfortunately the ball got stuck in his pads instead of in his hands, and he was in the ignominious position of having to stand stock-still, while Bingo deprived him of the ball, and of the glory of catching an ex-captain of England.

But Joe had a fleeting moment of triumph, for he made one run, while Bingo was bowled first ball. He did not rub his one run into Bingo, but at any rate Bingo had nothing to rub into him. Flip, Jumpy, and Pads all filled their own lines in the Maiden Croft scoring-book, and bulged over into those of less successful batsmen.

Up to this point Joe felt that he had got through the day without completely disgracing himself, and had he foreseen what was going to happen at the end of it, he would almost certainly have retired to bed hugging a fictitious internal pain.

A supper followed the match, and a speech by the ex-captain of England followed the supper.

‘Mr. and Mrs. Rumbold and gentlemen,’ he began, ‘although I speak this evening for a defeated eleven, I want to say what a pleasure it has been to field against such splendid cricketers—batsmen of whom every Granby boy throughout the length and breadth

of our Empire are proud.' (Applause, in which Joe joined until he caught Flip's eye, and remembered that he also was a Rumbold.) 'It is unnecessary,' the ex-captain continued, 'for me to congratulate our host and hostess upon the skill of their sons, whose names are household words wherever cricket is played'—('Hear, hear,' and a murmur from Joe of, 'Do stow it')—'but I may be permitted to thank them for the hospitality they have extended to us to-day, and wish them many years of health, happiness, and prosperity.' (Loud cheers, during which, if the ex-captain had been merciful, he would have stopped.) 'There is only one toast,' he went on glibly, 'which I venture to propose this evening, and that is the health of the youngest cricketer who took part in the match. To-morrow he goes to take the place which is waiting for him at Granby, and I am sure that I am only expressing the opinion of everyone present, when I say that all of us wish him the best of luck and plenty of caps, and feel confident that he will prove worthy of the honoured name which is his.' (Prolonged cheers, but Joe was too confused to pay any attention to them.) 'I ask you to drink the health of Jocelyn Rumbold, commonly known as Joe.' (Laughter, though what on earth there was to laugh at Joe could not imagine.)

Directly afterwards there was a dreadful noise, and everyone stood up; for Joe, in the confusion of the moment, stood up with the rest until someone pushed him back into his seat. Around him was a sea of faces, and above the noise he heard Bingo bellowing, 'Good old Lilley!' and Cousin William, who always turned up at functions, saying, 'Joe, my boy, accept my sincerest sympathy.' He looked round to try to catch a sight of his mother, but she was shut out from view by the figures of gesticulating men; and

then shouts of 'Speech, speech!' began to ring round the room.

'Must I really?' he asked the man who had insisted on being stumped, and who was standing by his chair.

'It's a bit rough, but just say you'll do your best, and that kind of thing,' he put his head down to Joe's and answered.

So Joe got up, and everyone else sat down. To sit down while they had been standing up was bad enough, but to stand up while they all sat down was infinitely more terrifying.

'Hem,' he said, and followed it with a quick 'Ahem.' (A laugh—Bingo's.) Then he remembered how the ex-captain of England had begun, and made a plunge.

'Mr. and Mrs. Rumbold and gentlemen,' was his opening, and as it was greeted with roars of laughter, he waited for the laughter to cease, and then repeated it. Again it was received with merriment, and Cousin William informed him across the table that he was a humorist.

For the time being Joe was not in a position to bandy words with William, but fleetingly he thought of giving up his speech and telling his cousin that he had once heard him say, 'No one who did not expect to find figs on a gooseberry-bush would look for humour in a Rumbold.' The desire, however, to retaliate upon William passed, but the laughter had again subsided, and he was still without anything to say.

'Just thank them,' his friend whispered encouragingly, and Joe thanked him afterwards.

'It's most awfully decent of all of you,' he began once more—'really most awfully decent. And I hope that I shan't make a most awful ass of myself at Granby. Anyhow, I'll do my best.'

He sat down so abruptly that he only just got a contact with his chair, and while he wiped away a bead of perspiration which was trickling down his nose, the Old Granbeians began to stampede round the room and to say 'good-bye. Several of them shook Joe by the hand or hit him on the back, and he felt that at any cost he must get into the Granby Eleven.

But when they had driven off singing a Granby song at the top of their voices, Joe found himself standing alone in the hall, and Cousin William looking sadly at him.

'Here's a sovereign for you, Joe, to spend in making yourself ill,' he said. 'I think you must be a throw-back, for you are too modest to be a proper Rumbold.'

What this meant Joe did not trouble to inquire, but he felt convinced that Cousin William was not half so foolish as he was generally considered to be.

CHAPTER II

AT GRANBY

'THE carriage is ordered for three o'clock, and your luggage must be ready by half-past one,' Mr. Rumbold said, when Joe came down to breakfast on the following morning.

'Are you coming with me?' Joe asked.

'No; your mother wishes to go with you,' was the answer; and Joe attacked his porridge.

Had he been given his choice, he would rather have travelled in a train than in the family chariot, but for ten years or more the Rumbolds had driven to Granby at the beginning of term, and in some vague way this mode of arrival was supposed to bestow distinction upon them.

'I'll bowl if anyone wants to bat,' Jumpy said, and having finished his breakfast he left the room.

'We might all go and have some practice,' Flip remarked.

'Joe wants it badly enough,' Bingo said.

'Anyhow, I made one more than you did,' Joe retorted.

'What's your average for the year?' Bingo asked.

'I don't play for my average; I don't keep the wretched thing,' Joe replied; and Pads grunted so loudly that Mr. Rumbold inquired if he was ever to have any peace.

After this warning Flip, Pads, and Bingo departed, and left Joe sitting at one end of the table, while his father sat at the other end and read the *Times*. Once or twice Mr. Rumbold looked over the top of his paper at Joe, and the latter suddenly realized that he was in a dangerous position. There was, in fact, nothing except the length of the table between him and the 'jaw' which his father delivered to him at the end of each holidays, and which on this occasion was likely to be especially forcible. Without any wish to miss his 'jaw' altogether, Joe was so content to let it wait that he abandoned the idea of marmalade, and fled from the room.

Presently he heard Bingo shouting for him, but he did not answer. To practise cricket when there would be no chance to play again for several months seemed to be a September madness. Moreover, Mrs. Jennifer, who had once been the Rumbold nurse but was by this time a very dear old lady with a strong distaste for any garment with a hole in it, was waiting for him.

He found her sitting by the open window in her room, and surrounded by the usual pile of clothes.

'Your socks, Master Joe, are a disgrace; it's my firm belief that you tear holes in them on purpose,' she said.

In answer Joe took his stand straight in front of her, and looking like a spirit of incarnate mischief made a grab at her gold-rimmed spectacles, which were lying on the table by her side. Mrs. Jennifer grabbed too, but Joe got them.

'I know you'll break them one of these days. Do take them off,' she pleaded.

'Not until you talk sense,' Joe said.

'And how don't I talk sense, I'd like to know?'

'You called me *Master* Joe.'

'I know my place.' And the place for your gold-rimmers is on the tip of my nose, and I'll go to Granby wearing them.' I tack on the "master" the day you go to Granby, and not a day before. And once tacked on, it sticks.' 'Then you never shall tack it on.'

Mrs. Jennifer looked at him for quite half a minute, and then both smiled and sighed.

'There's trouble in store for you, Joe; whoever gave you these notions I can't think,' she said.

'What notions?' Joe asked, and put the spectacles back on the table.

'About not being called "master." You'll be a Radical one of these days if you aren't careful. And whoever heard of a Rumbold being a Radical?'

'It wouldn't be bad fun to be something different,' Joe said.

'It would be mighty unpleasant for you, you take my word for it,' Mrs. Jennifer retorted.

For the next quarter of an hour Joe had to try on various garments, and he was still in a semi-dressed condition when his mother came into the room.

'The proofs of your photographs have come, Joe. I think they are quite good,' she said, and handed one photo to him and another to Mrs. Jennifer.

'Am I really as ugly as that? But I never pretended to be beautiful,' Joe remarked, and promptly put the photograph down.

'Ugly!' Mrs. Jennifer exclaimed; 'you have your faults, a heap of them, but you aren't ugly, or anything near it.'

'Then why do you sigh as if you had a pain when you look at me?' Joe asked.

Mrs. Jennifer and Joe's mother glanced at each other for a moment, but neither of them answered his question.

‘Anyhow, I hope you’ll be happy,’ Mrs. Jennifer said, so solemnly that Joe beseeched her to cheer up.

‘Have you finished with him, Jenny?’ Mrs. Rumbold asked.

‘Yes; but he’ll be a vest short for a week,’ was the answer.

Joe went down the stairs with his mother, and to his surprise she turned into a little room off the hall which was familiarly known as the ‘Pot-Room.’ It was a place which Joe avoided steadfastly, for in it were all the cups, vases, bowls, medals, and other trophies which at one time or another his brothers had won for the house of Rumbold.

His sole contribution to this glittering collection was a tiny cup which he had won in an egg-and-spoon race—a contribution so ridiculous that it had only gained a position in the room after strong protests from Flip and Bingo.

Mrs. Rumbold looked for a moment at the crowded tables, and then fixed her eyes upon the tiniest of all the cups.

‘Some day, perhaps, you will have a table to yourself,’ she said.

‘I don’t expect they have egg-and-spoon races at Granby,’ Joe replied.

‘Isn’t there anything else you might win a prize for?’

Joe thought a minute, and then slowly shook his head.

‘I wanted to say,’ his mother continued, ‘that I shall not be very disappointed if you are not so wonderfully successful at games. But you must try your hardest so that your father may not be vexed.’

‘Did you bring me in here to say that?’ Joe asked.

‘It seemed to be the right place,’ Mrs. Rumbold

answered, and smiled. As a family the Rumbolds were inclined to guffaw when they were amused, and Mrs. Rumbold was the only one of them who really knew the art of smiling. Together they wandered back into the hall, and there Joe met his father.

'Here is some money to begin with,' the latter said, 'and don't be extravagant. I'm going up to town in five minutes, so your mother will tell you what we expect you to do. Never forget, Joe, that you are a Rumbold.'

'I don't think I could if I tried,' Joe said.

'There is no necessity to try,' his father retorted quickly, and then kissed him on the left eyebrow.

In a sense Joe's manner of departure discouraged him, for he could remember that when Bingo had started to Granby for the first time Mr. Rumbold had been in the most cheerful spirits, and had prophesied many additions to the 'Pot-Room.' Now the head of the family went off to town without even troubling to deliver the usual 'jaw,' and in something rather like a bad temper.

'At any rate,' his mother said to him when the chariot rolled into the road, 'you have passed into a higher form than any Rumbold except William has ever done.'

'That doesn't count for anything with us,' Joe returned, and as Mrs. Rumbold did not speak, he added: 'Father never said a word when I brought back a very fat Tennyson and a fairly fat Milton last term.'

'You mustn't be peevish, Joe.'

'I don't feel peevish; I feel sort of lumpy inside,' he replied.

'Perhaps you ate too much Stodge for lunch,' his mother suggested.

'Not that kind of lumpiness, but a sort of feeling

as if I am no good at anything, and never should be,' he explained.

This was altogether a different complaint from those which usually attacked her children, and Mrs. Rumbold treated it with befitting seriousness. To confess failure, or even to acknowledge the possibility of it, was not part of the Rumbold creed ; and although Mrs. Rumbold was secretly pleased that one of her children should not be so inhumanly confident of success, she set to work to dispel Joe's doubts and fears. Very soon they were talking of Granby and of Mr. Lomax, to whose house Joe was going.

All of his brothers had been at Oakshotte, over which house Mr. Lomax had ruled for fifteen years. It was *the* athletic house of Granby, and Bingo had assured Joe that 'Max is a thundering good sort if you get the right side of him.'

How, then, to get on the right side of this potentate was the problem which Joe frankly asked his mother to solve.

Mrs. Rumbold, however, professed herself unable to distinguish between the sides of Mr. Lomax. 'I am sure that you will like Mrs. Lomax very much,' she said ; and Joe at once suspected that she was not very confident that he would like Mr. Lomax.

But whatever Joe's housemaster intended to be in the future, there was no doubt that he was at first almost boisterously cheerful.

'Delighted to see you,' he said to Mrs. Rumbold ; 'most delighted to see you. Your habit of driving over at the beginning of term is a good old custom which I am glad you keep up.'

But although his words were addressed to Mrs. Rumbold, his eyes were for her son, and very soon he took Joe by the shoulder and inspected him thoroughly.

‘More like Pads than Bingo. Certainly more like Pads. What do you think, Mrs. Rumbold?’

But what Mrs. Rumbold thought Mr. Lomax did not stop to hear.

‘You can rely upon me to look after him,’ he continued. ‘I wish we had half a dozen more to follow him.’

‘Unfortunately, Joe is the last,’ Mrs. Rumbold managed to say.

‘And I am sure the best. Ah! here is my wife.’

Mrs. Lomax, graceful and quiet, greeted both Mrs. Rumbold and Joe with a dignity which had been conspicuously lacking in her husband. She looked as if she never had cause for either haste or worry, while Mr. Lomax seemed to Joe to be made of wire and whipcord.

While the ladies were talking, Mr. Lomax darted about the room, and only stopped either to interrupt them or to ask Joe a question. These questions repeatedly took Joe unawares, for they often hit him on the back of his neck, and when he turned round to answer, quite a different question hit him on the same place. In ten minutes Joe had been reduced to a state of extreme physical and mental uneasiness. He replied as well as he could to the bombardment, but he was always two or three questions behind, and in the middle of one of his belated answers Mr. Lomax dived for the door and disappeared.

Never had Joe watched anyone’s departure with greater pleasure, and his first thought was that Bingo must be a perfect lunatic to say that such a man could be a good sort.

Immediately after Mr. Lomax had gone, several people were shown into the room, and eventually Joe discovered that they were Mr. and Mrs. Arkwright, with a son who looked as if he would be glad to take

refuge up the chimney ; Mr. Piper, whose son was so immaculate that he might have stepped straight out of a tailor's catalogue ; and a Miss Leening, who was in charge of a nephew called Clive.

The chatter was fast and furious. Mr. Arkwright kept on beginning remarks, which his wife interrupted. Mr. Piper resolutely informed first Mrs. Lomax, then Miss Leening, and lastly Joe's mother, that a so-called 'luncheon-train' ought to be one on which you could get a luncheon fit to eat ; while Miss Leening, stirred into words by a stray wasp which was buzzing round the room, became statistical, and told anyone and everybody that she had been stung five times in seven weeks, and that her gardener, who had been in her service for twenty-two years, had destroyed forty-seven wasps'-nests in thirty-three days. To Joe this sounded more like a rule-of-three sum than an interesting piece of information.

Doubtless Mrs. Lomax was accustomed to situations of the kind, for she controlled this one without any appearance of effort. And when Mr. Lomax darted back into the room, she saved him from welcoming Mr. Piper as the father of Clive, and protected Miss Leening from having to disclaim the motherhood of Arkwright.

While conversation, in which Mr. Lomax's voice was always audible, waxed so loud that everyone seemed to Joe to be talking and no one to be listening, another boy was shown into the room, and nobody either heard him announced or saw him enter. Joe, sitting alone and as far from the conversational zone as possible, was the first to see him, and as soon as he noticed that Joe's eyes were fixed upon him, he solemnly shut one of his. Clearly he saw more fun than awkwardness in the situation, and he did not show the smallest inclination to hurry matters.

Noiselessly he advanced towards Joe, and sat down on the far side of a huge bowl of dahlias.

'What a noise! Rather like the monkey-house at the Zoo. I expect they are all waiting to be fed,' he remarked.

'You can't feed at three o'clock in the afternoon,' Joe told him.

'Oh, can't I? I'm so hungry I could eat pickled pork,' he returned, and looked at his shoes, which had been brown until someone had cleaned them with a blacking-brush.

'What's your name?' Joe asked him.

'Ormsby. What's yours?'

'Rumbold.'

Then he looked intently at Joe, and the latter, being accustomed to the glory attached to his name, guessed what he was thinking.

'I'm right up against it at once,' Ormsby said.

'I'm the youngest, and no more use at games than a sardine,' Joe remarked.

'You can't help being good. I'm pretty useful at squails.'

'What are squails?' Joe asked.

'They are a game of skill, rather like chess only it's over quicker, and you don't get angry because you are beaten. Have you ever met the Black Gambit?'

'No; but I've met a silly ass,' Joe said, so loudly that Mr. Lomax's attention was turned from Miss Leening, who was telling him exactly how a wasp's-nest was constructed. Without apology Mr. Lomax left her, and dashed across the room.

'Where did you come from?' he asked Ormsby.

'I came from London,' Ormsby answered as he stood up.

'I mean how did you get in here without anyone seeing you?'

'A man showed me in, and I didn't like to interrupt. My name is Ormsby.'

'You had better come and be introduced to Mrs. Lomax. You have evidently introduced yourself already to Rumbold. You live in the same room with him. A good many boys would like to start their lives at Granby by living with a Rumbold. Come on!'

Ormsby shot one comical glance at Joe, and found him blushing furiously. Then, escorted by Mr. Lomax, he invaded the more inhabited part of the room; but before five minutes had passed he had again taken refuge behind the dahlias.

'If you don't belong to any of that crowd, we might do a bolt,' he suggested.

'My mother is over there,' Joe said, and nodded in the wrong direction.

'Not the one who sits bolt upright and talks about wasps?' he asked anxiously.

'She's Miss Leening.'

'Then she's been named wrong. Is your mother the one in grey?'

'Yes,' Joe replied; 'but I don't see what difference it makes to you.'

'It makes a lot, because you and I are in the same room, and if we have got to live with photographs of each other's people, it is jolly important what they look like. I give your mother full marks.'

As an acknowledgment of this gift Joe merely grunted, and Ormsby burst forth with apologies.

'Don't go and get sick with me at sight,' he said. 'I didn't mean any harm. My strong point as a stable-companion, or whatever you call it, is that I haven't got any people except my father, who is an astronomer, and lives up in the clouds trying to

pull comets' tails and things of that sort. He hasn't been photographed for years.'

'Hasn't he even been snapped?' Joe, who lived in a clicking atmosphere, asked.

'Once, when he was taking a header into the Danube. But it is all arms and legs, and you can't call it a photograph.'

How much to believe of this Joe did not know, for although Ormsby looked serious enough, he spoke mockingly. Joe, however, had to admit that his face was in his favour. He had the kind of clear, olive complexion which Mr. Rumbold would have denounced as foreign, and his hair was as black as ebony. Lurking round the corners of his mouth was a constant expression of amusement, and Joe was sure that all ladies would say that he had very fine eyes.

When Joe saw his mother into the chariot, she said: 'I do hope you will like Ormsby; you seemed to be getting on very well with him, and he is certainly a striking-looking boy.'

'I dare say he isn't a bad sort, but he talked an awful lot of twaddle. Thinks he's funny, I expect,' Joe returned, and for a brief moment wished that he was going to get into the chariot with his mother and return to Maiden Croft. Mrs. Rumbold, with her hands in his, knew what he was feeling, and knew, too, that he would be sorry afterwards if he betrayed himself.

'I think,' she said at random, 'that Ormsby has a most beautiful nose,' and no remark could have drawn Joe's attention more rapidly from himself.

'Nose!' he exclaimed. 'Whoever heard of anyone having a beautiful nose? You might as well say I've got a ripping big toe.'

Mrs. Rumbold smiled at him, and then said:

'Please, Joe, be kind to that poor little boy, Arkwright. He has never been to school, and he collects caterpillars when they are in season.'

'What does he do when they aren't in season?' Joe asked at once.

'I don't know, but you might find out and help him. I do hope your vests are warm enough;' and then Mrs. Rumbold wished him good-bye.

Joe stood in the street and waved until the chariot disappeared round the corner, and as he walked back to the house he was thinking of Arkwright, and not of himself. But how he was to provide him with occupation during the off-season for caterpillars was more than he could imagine.

Wondering whether Ormsby was not the sort of fellow who would enjoy looking after Arkwright, he reached the top of the long study passage, and found his talkative friend waiting for him.

'I say,' Ormsby began immediately, 'that child Arkwright is blubbing his eyes out in our room. I stowed him there for safety, but there will be a flood in the place unless we go and stop him. As soon as his people went, he gave a huge gulp and began to cry buckets. It was just as if something had burst.'

'Where are Piper and Clive?' Joe asked.

'Piper began to rot the infant, so I sent him flying. Clive was decent enough to walk off as if he was looking at a show for which he ought to have paid, and hadn't.'

'Let us go and see what he wants,' Joe said.

'What we want is a mop and two eye-plugs,' Ormsby replied.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST DIMENSION

THE light was fading when Ormsby and Joe went into their room, and to the latter Arkwright looked like a giant frog dressed up in an Eton suit. The home-sick boy was clinging to a very moist handkerchief, and sitting on a hard chair in the middle of the room.

The chair was not his fault, because there was not an easy one to sit upon, but he would have been less conspicuous if he had placed it in a corner. As he was he seemed to be an embodiment of woe. His tears had ceased, but he was in the heaving stage, which meant either a fresh downpour or a complete recovery.

Just how to help him did not occur to Joe. The best plan, he thought, was not to take any notice of him, but that could have been done more easily on the outside than on the inside of the door. It was not, in short, exactly what he had come to do.

Feeling abominably in the way, Joe walked to the window and poked his head out as far as the bars would allow him. The view was not one over which he felt inclined to linger, for all he could see was a small patch of garden and the part of the house in which Mr. and Mrs. Lomax lived. But as there was no room for anyone else in the window as long as he

stayed in it, he hoped that Ormsby's lack of employment would drive him to offer consolation. He did not know yet that Ormsby, even under the most depressing circumstances, was always a trier.

A deadly silence, broken only by Arkwright's gulps, pervaded the room for two or three minutes, and then Ormsby said very solemnly: 'I wish I could cry.'

'Why?' Arkwright asked plaintively.

'In the first place,' he answered, 'because it is something to do. Then, not being able to cry when you want to is like having a sneeze on the tip of your nose and not being able to get it out. Fourthly——'

'You have missed out thirdly,' Arkwright interrupted; and as he was audibly getting better, Joe turned round.

'You *are* coming on,' Ormsby continued. 'Thirdly, if I went about mopping my eyes, Piper would think I am a funk, and then we should have some sport.'

'Which is Piper?' Arkwright asked.

'He's the bantam-cock specimen who seemed to think you were funny. That's Piper.'

'I didn't get the impression that he is a very nice boy,' Arkwright ventured to say.

'I should be quite sure about that, if I were you. The thing to do with fellows like Piper is to take a strong line; if you don't make an impression on them, they will soon make one on you.'

'I don't think I fully understand,' Arkwright said very apologetically.

'If you don't kick them, they will kick you, as sure as eight beans make eight.'

'My mother,' Arkwright returned, 'says that all disputes ought to be settled by arbitration, for by such means all blows and bloodshed would be avoided.'

For a moment Ormsby looked hard at the strange

specimen in front of him, and then he broke out into a farrago of nonsense. 'Don't you worry about bloodshed or blubbing,' he began, 'heaps of great men have been blubbers. Napoleon cried like a baby because he was beaten at Waterloo; and Oliver Cromwell always carried a towel-horse about with him because he soaked so many handkerchiefs that they drenched his clothes. And as for that old bird, Diogenes, didn't you ever hear that when he was out of his tub for a week-end Alexander the Great went and blubbed it full to the spout?'

During this harangue Arkwright's eyes and mouth opened wider and wider.

'I hope,' he said most politely, 'you won't be vexed with me if I hesitate to believe what you say. A tub doesn't have a spout.'

'My dear Mr. Arkwright,' Ormsby replied, 'I can assure you that I don't mind how long you hesitate if you will stop talking like a cross between a mouldy copy-book and a first-class prig. And I speak, sir, not only for myself, but also for Mr. Rumbold, who is a member of a most distinguished family.'

'Oh, do stop jawing!' Joe told Ormsby; and then, turning to Arkwright, he added: 'Don't you believe this fellow's rot.'

'Aren't you a member of a distinguished family?' Arkwright asked Joe, and looked at him for the first time.

But before Joe could reply to this question, Ormsby had asked another.

'Don't you read the *Sportsman*?' he inquired.

Arkwright shook his head. Quite plainly he had never even heard of the *Sportsman*.

'What papers do you have at your place?' Ormsby continued.

'The *Times*, but my mother doesn't care for me to

see it. But I can read the *Hibbert Journal*, and *Notes and Queries*, and on Sundays *Blackwood's Magazine*,' was the reply.

'And haven't you ever heard of the Rumbolds?' Ormsby inquired eagerly.

'I don't quite know; that is, I am not altogether sure. I mean, perhaps it would be better——'

'What's up? Let's hear it,' Ormsby interrupted.

'The fact is—and I hope you won't mind,' he began, and looked at Joe—'but I think I have heard of one Rumbold.'

'Was he M. R., T. J., N. C., or P. S.?' Ormsby asked immediately.

'I don't know his initials. Oh yes, I do; he was called Ephraim.'

Joe shook his head, but Ormsby was not content to leave Ephraim Rumbold in peace.

'Where did you bump up against him?' he asked.

'He came to do something to our electric light, and he stole a bicycle,' Arkwright replied in semi-quavers, and looked very beseechingly at Joe.

But even if the latter had wished to disown this degenerate possessor of his name, Ormsby's laughter would have prevented him from being heard.

'Mr. Arkwright,' Ormsby said at last, 'you are the most priceless man I have ever met. I can now meet Mr. Rumbold on equal terms, for I can use the electric-lighter who bagged your bicycle as a set-off against M. R., T. J., N. C., or P. S.'

'It wasn't my bicycle. I am only allowed to ride a tricycle,' Arkwright corrected.

'It doesn't matter a row of pins whose bicycle it was, so long as the man's name was Rumbold.'

'I do hope I have been telling the truth. His name might have been Rumble, or——'

'Don't you spoil a good story; it's any odds his

name was Rumbold. And now, if you are ready to get a move on, we might go and find out where you live.'

Arkwright got up and immediately followed Ormsby, while Joe, feeling more than a little angry, was left in sole possession of the room.

It was one thing, he thought, not to have heard of his brothers, but it was quite another to have produced a Rumbold who stole bicycles. Besides, in his desire to please Ormsby, this odd specimen had said that he hoped he was telling the truth, while any fellow with an atom of decency in him would have hoped that he was telling lies. On the whole, Joe decided that Arkwright and his caterpillars were no concern of his.

So when Ormsby returned with a broad grin on his face, Joe felt it his duty to put things clearly before him.

'You,' he announced immediately, 'have stuffed that baby up with so many lies that he didn't know what he was saying. If he isn't careful, I shall have to smack his head.'

'Well, smack it gently,' Ormsby returned, with exasperating cheerfulness.

'It's a shame to get hold of such a fellow as that, and stuff him full of yarns about Cromwell and Alexander the Great.'

'We had to turn off the tear-tap,' Ormsby explained, 'and if we had told him that he ought to be dragging about a wooden horse at the end of a string, he would have blubbed for hours. Now he's busy unpacking a box of books, and he means to find out if Diogenes and old Alex lived at the same time. Anyhow, he'll forget to be home-sick for a few minutes. Unless we teach him things quick, he will have his life rotted out of him.'

To this Joe only answered with a grunt.

'Will you help, if I will? In a way, he seems sort of stranded, and we seem to have found him,' Ormsby said.

'Yes, I'll help; but I should think you'd be able to do the job by yourself; you go at such a pace,' Joe replied.

'That's just it—I blunder on,' Ormsby said; and taking a book out of his pocket, he began to read it.

As Joe had neither a book to read nor anything whatever to do, he watched Ormsby for a time, and finally resolved to interrupt him.

'How shall we decorate our room?' he asked; and the book was shut with a bang, and pocketed.

'I have a scheme,' Ormsby said at once. 'The ordinary room either looks as if it belongs to an actor with a taste for horse-racing, or it is full of photographs of fellows who have just brushed their hair with a damp brush. I poked my head into several rooms, and there isn't one of them which has a scheme.'

'I want something comfortable to sit down on, and you can't sit on a scheme,' Joe replied emphatically.

'Anyway, you are trying to sit on mine before you have even heard of it. When you hear it, you are simply cock-certain to like it.'

Joe assured him that he should do nothing of the sort, for he had not had time to discover that the only way to disarm Ormsby was to agree with him.

'To begin with, our curtains must all match the wall-paper,' he continued; 'and then we must belong to a period. We can be Early French, or Mid-Victorian, or Græco-Roman, or what you like. It doesn't matter a bit how uncomfortable you are, but you mustn't put a Græco-Roman chair in a Catch-as-Catch-Can room.'

'You've got a blooming bee in your bonnet!' Joe told him.

'There's a chap called Sheraton, and another called Chippendale; I know about them from my father, because when he is not looking for stars he's hunting for furniture. I'd like to make old Sheraton sit in our drawing-room for a month; I'll bet he would have a backache.'

'Do pull yourself together and talk sense for a minute,' Joe said.

'Well, then, what do you want?'

'Two comfortable chairs—deckers, with plenty of cushions in them—a pair of tongs which don't squeeze your fingers every time you use them, a saucepan, and a few pots and pans, and things.'

'This place isn't a scullery,' Ormsby said.

'At any rate, half of it is mine,' Joe retorted.

'I'll toss you for the whole of it,' Ormsby replied immediately.

For some reason or other Joe felt sure that he should win if they tossed, so he pulled a penny out of his pocket and put it on the table.

'Tails,' Ormsby said, and continued: 'that's all right; now we can get on with my scheme.'

'Confound your scheme!' Joe said.

'My idea is to make this room unlike anyone else's. I refuse to have any anxious-looking stags, or children blowing bubbles, or ships in distress on our walls. The thing to do is to make it a room that nobody ever wants to come into.'

'We have got to live here,' Joe reminded him.

'Not a bit of it! We can rest just as well in somebody else's room; and when we are working, we shall work all the harder for not being comfortable. We shall be so jolly glad to finish and get away.'

'As far as I can see, we might as well have no room

at all,' said Joe, and began to wish that he had left Ormsby to read in peace.

'How about making it a museum for Rumbold relics?' was the next suggestion, and it was too much for Joe.

'I am not a Rumbold relic, and I am no good at anything; so you had better shut up,' he said.

Before Ormsby could reply, they were interrupted by a message from Mr. Lomax. Led by a manservant, whose trousers were so badly in need of bracing that he looked as if he must trip over them, they marched solemnly into their housemaster's study, and found that four more new boys had arrived.

Two years before Mr. Lomax had spent his summer holidays in a remote place in the Highlands, trying to catch trout and to grow a beard. The trout refused to be caught, and the beard, making a tentative appearance, was stubbly and red. At his wife's urgent request, he refrained from showing his experiment to the critical eyes of Granby. In fact, on the day before he left the Highlands, he cut it off with Mrs. Lomax's best scissors, and returned to his clean-shaven state.

Still, without his beard, he was more red than ruddy. His hair had missed being carroty by a shade, or perhaps two shades, but his eyebrows had a tinge of redness, and his face was the colour of new red brick. He did not look as if he had an ounce of superfluous flesh on his body, and even when he was sitting down he gave an impression of restlessness. Joe felt that at any moment he might leap out of his chair and vault over the table, just to proclaim the glorious fact that he was alive and strong.

Seated at his table, Mr. Lomax cast a roving eye over the boys grouped in front of him, and then told them to answer to their names. In a moment it was

announced that a very fat boy, who looked like a human sausage, was called Street ; that Harper had a magnificent Adam's apple which jumped about when he spoke ; that Clarkson's teeth were as irregular as a French verb ; and that Cole was a prodigy for a fourteen-year-old.

Indeed, Joe imagined that Cole must have strayed into the room by mistake, for he was more than a size bigger than any of the other boys, and there was no doubt that the application of a razor would have improved his personal appearance. Piper, spick and span, sank into insignificance by the side of Cole, and Ormsby's astonishment at the latter was totally undisguised.

'I believe he's a mammoth unless he's a yak,' he whispered to Joe ; and Mr. Lomax immediately fell upon him.

'If you have anything to say, it is unnecessary to whisper,' he said, and looked at Ormsby.

So far from having 'anything to say' Ormsby shuffled gradually from his rather prominent position and took refuge behind Joe's back, on which, during the next five minutes, he amused himself by forming words with his finger.

Without any more preliminaries, Mr. Lomax, speaking very quickly, began to address the new boys. As far as Joe could understand they were being especially exhorted to keep themselves physically fit.

'You have all got to remember,' Mr. Lomax said, 'that although you are young boys now, the honour of the house will be in your hands in a few years' time. Look round the dining-room and see for yourselves how high that honour has stood and stands to-day. It is for you to keep up the standard, and to see that you do not fail when the day comes for the house to rely upon you. Inefficiency is only another word

for slackness. Don't forget that. If you will keep your muscles in good condition, you will not have much trouble with your minds.'

He went on in the same vein for another minute or two, but Joe's attention was greatly diverted from the harangue by the fact that such questions as, 'I think he will have to supply Arkwright with potted muscles, don't you?' (with the comma and query all complete), were being conveyed to him by means of Ormsby's finger and his own back.

'Now I will take your measurements in alphabetical order,' Mr. Lomax finished up; and Joe was hugely astonished that this first ordeal was over without his housemaster having said a single word about work in school.

'What on earth does the man mean? I don't believe my measurements are in alphabetical order; I haven't had time to put them straight,' Ormsby whispered into Joe's ear, but Mr. Lomax was too busy looking for a book to notice him.

'All of you will, of course, be measured in the school gymnasium,' Mr. Lomax remarked, with his head half inside a drawer, 'but I always keep my own figures, so that I can keep an eye on your development. I will take you in this order,' he continued, when he had found the book: 'Arkwright, Clarkson, Clive, Cole, Harper, Ormsby, Piper, Rumbold (I am glad still to have a boy of that name in my house)'—at which statement Joe shuffled his feet, and Ormsby wrote 'Prolonged cheers' on his back—'Street. Will all of you, except Arkwright, go through that door into the drawing-room, and wait until you are called?'

'He's begun with the thin edge of the wedge, and is going to finish with the fat; but I'm glad I haven't got to watch Arkwright's physical development. Oh, Cæsar's wife's uncle!'

This last exclamation was drawn from the expressive Ormsby by the fact that he had passed through the door, and had found Mrs. Lomax entertaining three or four fellows, bigger and less unkempt than Cole.

'Palmer,' Mrs. Lomax said, as if she was glad to welcome this invasion, 'these are the new boys. Palmer,' she added, 'is the head of the house.'

Incumbent as it was upon Palmer to do something, it must be admitted that he did not do much. Lifting himself from his chair, he nodded at a distant picture, blushed, and sat down.

Under similar conditions Joe felt perfectly certain that Bingo would not have blushed, nor had he until that moment believed that such a blood as Palmer could blush. Had it been in order, Joe would have liked to congratulate him.

Ormsby, having found his seat behind the dahlias vacant, had again taken it; but before Joe could join him a big fellow with a pale face and a moustache, which seemed to have bloomed on one side of his lip and only budded on the other, bore down upon him and asked if his name was Rumbold.

'Yes,' Joe answered, and had a great desire to say 'No.'

'I guessed it. I was a friend of Bingo's; I knew he was sending a young brother here this term. I dare say you have heard him speak of me.'

'I am awfully sorry, but I don't know what your name is,' Joe was compelled to say.

'I'm Rose; I forgot,' he answered.

'O. L. Rose?' Joe said, and was rewarded by a smile.

He had never heard Rose's name mentioned by Bingo, but in some old book he had seen 'O. L. Rose,' and initials always remained glutinously in his memory.

It was not a convenient time, Joe thought, to tell Rose that Bingo had annexed one of his books ; but had he wanted to, he would not have been able. For Rose, who was too unctuous for Joe's liking, assailed him with a string of questions about Flip, Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo. Several times he corrected the answers, and before he left the room with Palmer and the other bloods he had succeeded in making Joe exceedingly envious of Ormsby's seclusion.

Gradually Mr. Lomax worked through his list until Street and Joe were alone, for Mrs. Lomax, knowing that it was impossible to drag any conversation out of boys who were going to be measured, had left the room.

'I shall catch it hot ; all my relations are very fat until they are about twenty, and then they begin to get thinner and thinner, and finish up almost like skeletons,' Street said.

Joe looked at him with an eye anxious to discover some means of encouraging him, but he looked in vain.

'You might mention that,' he replied.

'There wouldn't be the ghost of a chance of his believing it if I did. I ought really to have brought my father with me. Mr. Lomax might have believed me then.'

'I am too thin,' Joe said.

'I wouldn't worry about that ; he'd pass you if you were made of string because you are a Rumbold,' Street told him.

This everlasting reference to his name determined Joe to say a few plain things to Street, but before he could do more than begin one sentence, which would not finish because he wanted to make it so very emphatic, his turn had come.

He found Mr. Lomax turning over the pages of a

notebook, and looking anything but pleased. Physically, Joe guessed, the new boys had not reached a high standard of development. But as he was preparing for his examination he was led to understand that Mr. Lomax had great hopes of him.

Measurements of Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo were written in that terrible book, and as Mr. Lomax looked back at them he smiled and told Joe that a Rumbold had never failed to atone for a large number of disappointments. His smile, however, vanished as Joe submitted himself to the examination.

Joe failed dismally in biceps; he was not broad enough across the chest; he was not heavy enough for his age; and his legs were too small, and said to be in a deplorable condition. Altogether Joe's body reduced Mr. Lomax to an almost peevish state of exasperation, and it is to his credit that he kept his temper, for the disappointment was really a serious one to him.

'I can't make it out; I can't understand it. Let me measure your calf again,' he said; but no measuring tape in the world could bring Joe's calf up to a normal standard.

'I knew your mother was making a mistake when she sent you to Malcolm's instead of to Richardson's; I told her so at the time. You have been neglected in every way; you want hardening all round,' Mr. Lomax said; 'but that must be the cause of it, and to have found out the cause is more than half the battle. We'll soon make you a Rumbold in more than name. But I don't like entering those measurements in my book; I can't think what your father would say about them. But never mind; don't worry about it; I'll put you right in no time. Just send Street to me.'

Mr. Lomax had become more cheerful as he con-

tinued to talk while Joe was dressing, but the latter went back to his room wondering if his housemaster ever thought of anything except muscles, and whether he would have the patience to arrive at Street's dimensions.

'I mean,' Ormsby greeted Joe at once, 'to bag that book of Max's if I get a chance. Why should he be allowed to put down in his blooming notebook that my calf was half an inch too small when I was fourteen?'

'He'd only get another book if he lost that one, and then he'd measure us all again. I'd rather be vaccinated,' Joe replied.

'We shall have trouble with Max; he treated my body as if it belonged to the house. I'm not going to give my body away, and I'm not going to let anyone bag it,' Ormsby announced, and was continuing to state his opinion of Mr. Lomax when Street was seen ambling down the passage, and gurgling as he ambled.

'Halloa, what luck?' Joe shouted; and Street's figure blocked the doorway.

'I made a record round the middle, and heard a lot about adipose tissue. He was rather rude,' he said.

'Did you tell him about getting thin when you are older?' asked Joe.

'Yes, and he said, "Then I wish you'd go away and not let me see you again for several years,"' Street replied, and went slowly back to his room.

CHAPTER IV

A CLINGING ROSE

WHEN Joe went to bed for the first time at Granby, he found that Ormsby's cubicle was on one side of his, and that Cole's was on the other. Cole went to sleep as soon as he was in bed, and snored as soon as he was asleep. At breakfast in the hall Joe discovered that Ormsby sat on his left and Cole on his right.

'This is awful,' Ormsby said, 'because we shall never get a holiday from each other. Have you got a letter already? I only get about one a month.'

From London Mr. Rumbold had written Joe 'the jaw' he had not found time to give. To be correct, however, it was more of an exhortation to perform athletic feats and to collect caps than an ordinary lecture. Through the whole of it Joe could trace a suspicion of fear that he might prove a failure. 'Concentrate,' his father wrote; 'make up your mind to get into the eleven and fifteen, and you will get there. Your brothers have made your way easy for you. And if you can find someone to take you into the eleven room, you will find my name in one of the best elevens Granby ever had.'

Joe put down the letter with something very like a groan, and stared at the poached egg in front of him.

'The middle of your egg seems to have done a bolt ; there's nothing left except skin,' Ormsby said.

'I should think Max is beginning to diet us already, and this must have been meant for Street,' Joe replied, and then he had to answer some questions of Cole's.

They were the usual questions about M. R., T. J., N. C., and P. S., but Ormsby employed the time during which Joe was answering them to look round the hall.

'I've changed my mind,' he said, when Joe was disengaged ; 'our room mustn't be a place for relics.'

'If it was, it would be one way of getting rid of you,' was the reply.

'But it can't be, because this hall is already one,' Ormsby continued ; 'you can't look straight or sideways without seeing "Rumbold" on the walls. There's a photo of one of your brothers over there.'

'That's Pads ; he's rather a good sort.'

Ormsby could not understand the detached manner in which Joe spoke of his brothers ; it was, he supposed, the Rumbold way of showing pride. For a moment he looked puzzled, but then he cast doubt aside, and went on :

'It's like going into a house where some famous man used to live, and that always gives me the pip.'

'From the way you talk, anyone would think I'd been round with a paint-pot sticking up those names. How the dickens can I help it ?' Joe returned. But before Ormsby could continue, Mr. Lomax, alert and smiling, pounced down upon Joe, and asked if he had been given his porridge.

Joe longed to say that he never wanted to see any porridge again, but guessing that such a confession would irritate his housemaster he only said that he had not missed it.

'A very stupid mistake. Fancy a Rumbold without his porridge. Why, it's quite an institution in the house—almost a mascot,' was Max's reply; and he evidently thought it amusing, for he went away to repeat it to the boys at the senior table.

'It's just what I told you,' Joe heard Ormsby saying; 'unless I am jolly careful, I shall catch it.'

'Catch what?'

'I am in danger of becoming Rumboldish,' Ormsby replied, 'and it is a disease which I should say Piper would catch easily. He's already staring at those boards, and wondering how soon he can get his name on them. A Rumboldship is got by the sweat of your brow and many blisters, and before you are elected you must have hit a few balls on to the top of some inconvenient place like a chapel.'

'Absolute drivel,' Joe remarked, and in trying to remove an energetic fly from the back of his head he inadvertently smacked Ormsby's.

'Has it come to that already?' the latter asked.

'I was slogging at a fly,' Joe explained.

'So many fellows have a go at me on purpose that it's a bit rough to be swiped by mistake. You might say "Fore," or whatever it is golfers say, when you are letting out at another fly, and I'll move.'

Having finished his breakfast, Joe left the hall without replying to this; but he had not been in his room for a minute when Ormsby, still full of spirits and conversation, joined him.

'I was afraid you would soon be sick of me, but it's like this,' he began at once: 'I live alone with my father, and he's frightfully learned and scaring. He's got a thing called a "European reputation"; he can't help it, and he's one of the very best, but it's not a comfortable thing to live with. I'm so afraid of saying something silly I never say anything at

all. I get sort of bottled up, and when the holidays are finished I come out in spate and overflow all over the place. My father doesn't know anything about games, and doesn't want to, so when I found out that I had got to live with you—well, it seemed rather funny. But if you get sick of my jawing, I'll seal up my tongue—embalm it or something.'

'I'll heave a book at your head when I've had enough,' Joe told him.

'That's capital, and then we shall know where we are. But don't shoot straight,' he replied, and while he was speaking Palmer walked into the room.

'I want you fellows,' he said, 'to change directly after morning-school; we are going to have a game of footer on the house-field, just to see what you are made of.'

He looked enormously big, but as he also appeared to be quite amiable Joe asked him where the field was.

'Just at the back of the house,' he replied; 'it used to be Max's orchard, but he has cleared away the trees so that we can have some sort of a game on it. We are the only house which has a field of its own. It's large enough for you to stretch your legs on.' And then he asked whether Bingo was all right.

As soon as he had been assured that Bingo was in excellent health he disappeared, and Ormsby immediately gave a terrific sigh.

'I'm made of the usual stuff,' he said, 'and I wanted to stretch my legs by going into the town to buy things.'

'What sort of things?' Joe asked suspiciously.

'Anything. I've got more money than I ever had, and I want to spend it. The thing to do with money is to get rid of it at once, or you'll always be wasting time wondering what you'll spend it on, and how much you have got left. And as for old Max cutting

down apple-trees so that we can stretch our legs, I call it sheer waste. I'd rather eat a Cox's orange pippin any day than kick a football. It's time to go to chapel; we'd better find Arkwright, or he'll get into the school museum, and if he once gets there, they'll never let him out,' he continued to grumble in a good-natured way, while Joe was putting on his boots.

They had, however, no difficulty in finding Arkwright, for when they went out of their room they discovered him propped forlornly against the wall of the study passage.

'You look as if you had been left there by someone. Cheer up,' Ormsby told him.

'I didn't like to disturb you, and I don't know the way to chapel,' he answered.

'What you are suffering from is a rush of politeness to the head. Burst in whenever you like; do it with a bang; make things hum,' Ormsby went on.

Before they had left the house, Street, Clive, and Harper joined them.

'I am in the same room with Arkwright. Just look at him,' Street remarked to Joe.

But before Joe could answer, Clive said: 'I say, Rumbold, I hope you don't mind Harper and me hanging on to you for a bit; I expect you know your way about this place, and we don't.'

'I know my way up to chapel; you can't miss it. Come on,' Joe replied, and tried to catch up Ormsby, who was still pouring advice into Arkwright's ears.

But Clive was most anxious to be pleasant. 'I saw your brother, N. C., make over a hundred against Sussex—ripping innings: I got his autograph,' he remarked.

'Pads is quite a good sort,' Joe said, and remembered that he had made the same reply to Ormsby.

'I wish I had a lot of brothers who were first-class cricketers,' Clive continued.

'You might get a bit fed up with them,' Joe grunted.

'By Jove! no,' Harper remarked so emphatically that his Adam's apple made quite a journey; 'you never get fed up with seeing your own name in the papers. My father once brought a libel action against a newspaper, and I never had such a time in my life. All the fellows at my school were awfully keen.'

'Who won it?' Joe asked.

'We won, but we only got a farthing damages.'

'Rotten swindle,' Clive announced.

'It doesn't matter how much you win by as long as you win. My father meant to give whatever damages he got to some charity,' Harper explained, and Joe waited for Street, who had been left behind.

'He seems to me to have a lot of side on—sort of treats his brothers as if they were too big bloods for us to talk about,' Clive, a moment later, remarked to Harper.

'Rot!' the latter answered; 'he's a jolly good sort. Wouldn't you put on side if you happened to be a Rumbold?'

'I dare say I should fancy myself a bit,' Clive admitted.

Joe lost sight of Ormsby in chapel, but soon afterwards he discovered that they were in the same class, and that their desks were next each other in the Big Classical.

'Talk about coincidences, we might as well be the Siamese twins. It's uncanny,' Ormsby said, and stopped abruptly, for his class-master's eyes were turned in his direction.

Early impressions of Mr. Ridley were entirely favourable. On the first morning of term he certainly

did not lay himself out to worry anybody, and although he did have to attack a boy named Buckle, anyone who had ever been at school could see with one eye that Buckle was an old hand at provoking masters.

As Ormsby and Joe walked back to the house they agreed that Buckle was a silly idiot, which was more a tribute to Mr. Ridley than a condemnation of Buckle.

'I like our beak,' Ormsby said; 'he looks as if he had just had a bath, and I should think he'd make a very good husband.'

'You're quite cracked,' Joe told him.

'That's how my father always describes nice jog-trot people who bore him to tears. I should think our beak is a kind, easy-going man who won't worry us much, and he's about the right age.'

'What is the right age?'

'Why, just old enough to like a quiet life, and young enough to remember that he didn't know everything when he was in the cradle. He'll *do*.'

'I shouldn't be so sure that he's a slacker if I were you; he looks as if he might drop on you like blazes if he felt like it,' Joe said.

'Anyhow, I am going to think of him as a man I can trust, until I find him out; and now for this rotten footer,' Ormsby returned.

In the field they found some of the bloods of the house kicking balls about, and Mr. Lomax talking seriously to Palmer. In turn Mr. Lomax inspected all the new boys, except Street and Arkwright, who were, for different reasons, unworthy of his inspection.

'You look better stripped—more like a Rumbold,' he said to Joe; but Cole was the boy who met with his warmest approval. 'In two years' time at the most that boy will be a giant and in the school fifteen;

he's well worth watching,' Max said to Palmer, and added that the game had better begin.

'I've only ever seen one football, and I am sure that it was rounder than this one. Can you tell me what I am expected to do?' Arkwright asked Ormsby. No more comical figure than Arkwright's had ever been seen on Max's field. He was wearing a long grey sweater that reached his knees, and underneath it were legs that looked scarcely thicker than pencils. A puzzled expression was on his face, such as is to be seen on the faces of people who are playing some new round game, and are wondering why they are doing it.

For a moment Ormsby looked as if he was going to break out into tumultuous laughter, and then he managed to check himself.

'What you have to do is to keep out of Cole's way; he's on the other side, and if he falls on the top of you he'll squash your life out,' he said very seriously.

'I will be very careful,' Arkwright said; and then the sides lined up, Palmer and Rose looking after the one on which Ormsby, Joe, and Arkwright were playing, while the other one—which included Cole—was in charge of two bloods called West and Armistage.

'Just run about enough to keep warm; but keep your eye on the ball, and don't touch it,' Ormsby continued, 'or you'll get trodden on.'

While Joe was looking at Arkwright, and trying to think of something more cheerful to say to him, Cole suddenly kicked off and landed the ball straight against his chest. The result of this was that Joe fell over abruptly, and had the novel experience of having several of his opponents scrambling about on the top of him.

When this mêlée ceased and Joe regained his feet,

he was utterly astonished to hear Palmer saying: 'Well played, Rumbold; always fall on the ball.'

'That's not what Ormsby told me to do,' Arkwright remarked in Joe's ear.

But at that moment Joe had not the wind, even if he had the inclination, to explain to either Palmer or Arkwright that chance, and not design, had caused him to lie with the ball beneath him. Glory, however, having come to him so quickly and unexpectedly, he was not in the least greedy for further distinction, and before five minutes had passed it was clear that Cole was destined to be the central figure of the fray.

Twice Cole got the ball and barged up the field, leaving his opponents lying at all angles upon the ground. In Joe's opinion, he was more like an infuriated bull than a boy; but whatever he resembled both Ormsby and Joe were fired with a desire to stop him. So, disregarding the rules of the game—which was not difficult, because at that time they knew scarcely any of them—they kept as close as they could to Cole, and fairly went for him before he got under way. In spite of shouts and protests from Palmer, Rose, and West (Armitage only laughed), the game rapidly degenerated into a struggle to suppress Cole. Whenever they got him down they soundly sat upon him, Arkwright always arriving last, but in time to perch himself insecurely on the top of the heap.

A few of the smaller boys in the house had been pressed into taking a part in this struggle, but most of them took it in a very light and frivolous spirit. Not until it was over did Joe realize that Ormsby had been the promoter of this concentrated attack upon Cole.

'It would have been a dull show if we hadn't done something to liven it up. As it was, it was rather

good fun. Even the bloods laughed towards the end of it,' Ormsby said as they were changing.

But if the bloods had laughed at this exhibition, they showed on that same evening that they were not altogether pleased with it.

Palmer was captain of footer, as well as head of the house, but he was a man of few words, while Rose was a man of many. After tea all the new fellows were summoned to appear before Palmer and Rose in the house library, and after Palmer had hummed a good deal and hawed a little, Rose proceeded to address the meeting.

Nature had not endowed Rose with attractive features, and his large mouth contained a very long and active tongue. During his oration Palmer kept on nodding and saying, 'That's it,' while Ormsby, sitting by the side of Joe, made sounds suggestive of sleep.

The rules of Rugby football were explained in detail; then came advice about the game, and this was followed by some remarks about the house, at which fellows in other houses would have scoffed.

Having at last been told what was expected of them, Joe imagined that they would be allowed to go, but he did not know Rose.

Individual merit was the next subject, but where it was going to be found in that absurd scramble was more than Joe could conceive. Rose, however, had a vivid imagination.

Piper was told that in time he might become a 'pretty nippy half-back.' Cole was praised for his strength and weight, but censured for his selfishness. Street and Arkwright were dismissed as hopeless for the present. Clive, Harper, and Clarkson were bunched together, and told that with a mighty dose of 'gym' they might become pretty useful in a few

years. Ormsby was told that football was not a mere rag, and that if he dared to behave again as if it was he would suffer.

Joe alone had not been mentioned, and in the guilelessness of his heart he thought that he had been left out because his performance had been so bad that it had reduced even Rose to a state of speechlessness. Indeed, Joe imagined that out of consideration for his brothers, Rose was content to pass him over in the silence which stood for kindness.

Never was he more mistaken. He had merely been left out because Rose, like an orator, was keeping his tit-bit until the end.

'And lastly,' he said, 'I will mention the most promising player,' and proceeded not only to say what Joe's brothers had done for the house, but also what Joe was clearly going to do.

To Joe this finale was frankly disconcerting and almost indecent. His sense of the fitness of things revolted against Rose's panegyric; his sense of modesty was outraged. No doubt—as Ormsby said afterwards—Rose thought that he was doing him a good turn, but however good his intentions were, the result of them was to make Joe so ashamed of himself that blinding tears were standing in his eyes when he got back to his room. Ormsby had one glance at him, and then, having said 'Rough luck!' opened a book and began to whistle.

It was some time before Joe was sure enough of himself to express any opinion about Rose, but at last he blurted out: 'I am simply fed up with that fellow. If he'd got the sense of a guinea-pig, he must know that you always tackled Cole first.'

'I don't take my games seriously enough to please great men,' Ormsby answered, without looking up.

'I'll write and ask Pads about him. It's absolutely

sickening to have to listen to such drivel. You can't make a fellow good at games by pretending he is,' Joe continued.

To this Ormsby did not reply. For some reason which he could not by any means understand Joe was really very disgusted and angry, but for his own part he was convinced that a Rumbold must be good at games, and that this member of the family was making an extraordinary fuss about a very trivial business. Still, he had already seen enough of Joe to like him, and if his 'stable companion' felt like being angry with Rose, he was quite ready to be angry with him. For however great a swell Rose might be, he was also, Ormsby thought, a very good imitation of a thorough bounder.

'I'd write to your brother now if I were you. We might as well know what sort of chap Rose really is,' Ormsby said at last; but just as Joe was going to take this advice, a fellow called Temperley, who had been at Granby for a year, came in to see Ormsby.

He had been at the same private school with Ormsby, and his first question was to ask the latter if he was still as mad as ever.

'I became sane directly after you left,' Ormsby answered, 'and I gradually managed to shunt all the discredit for my rows on to you. All the beaks used to go about saying, "Since Temperley left, Ormsby has become a different boy." You could hear them chattering it all over the place.'

'When you've got tired of hearing this fellow jaw, send him along to me; I can cure him,' Temperley, who looked as good-natured as anyone can look without appearing stupid, said to Joe.

'We have already arranged that I am to throw a book at his head whenever I want him to stop,' Joe answered.

‘Only a paper-covered book—I forgot to mention that,’ Ormsby said, and added at once: ‘I say, Pro, you might tell us a few things.’

‘Blaze away! That’s what I came for. But it will be pretty hard to tell Rumbold anything he doesn’t know about Granby,’ was the reply.

‘I want to know just how big an ass Rose is,’ Joe said.

‘That’s a fair stumper to begin with. How do you know he is an ass at all? Your brother Bingo didn’t think he was.’

In a few terse words Joe announced why he had concluded that Rose was asinine, and at the end of them Temperley smiled for quite a minute.

‘I don’t like Rose,’ he began, ‘but some fellows do. I should say it is wisest to like Rose; he’s crafty, and he’s good enough at games to pass in a crowd. But if I were you I wouldn’t get the idea into my head that he’s an ass, because anyone who thinks that generally gets it smacked. It’s a pity he’s decided to keep an eye on you, but it’s quite natural because he simply pulled himself to the top by hanging on to Bingo’s tail. He’s a sticky sort of chap.’

‘Is Palmer a good sort?’ Ormsby asked.

‘One of the best, only he will probably let Rose run the house. Palmer gets very sleepy after meals.’

‘Armitage?’

‘He’s the best of the lot, and he’s really our spot man at games, but his luck is dead out. He’s caught mumps and chicken-pox since he’s been here, and he’s had water on the knee twice, and a broken collar-bone; and the only time he’s cribbed he got nailed by the Head making a surprise visit into the classroom. Did Max ask if you were immune?’

‘Im—what?’ Ormsby asked.

Immune. He asked me, and I said I was because I was too frightened to say I wasn't, and it turned out that I had been lying badly. What he wanted to know was if I had got through the silly diseases which you are not supposed to have twice ; but he's dropped that lately, and gets it all out of the doctor.'

Joe wanted very much to know what Temperley thought of Bingo, but was far too shy to ask such an embarrassing question. Ormsby, however, had no scruples when he wanted to satisfy his curiosity.

'Why,' he asked, 'did this chap's brother let Rose hang on to him?'

'Some fellows are like that, aren't they? But Bingo could really do things, and if he hadn't dug up some silly old customs which were better buried, I could forgive him putting on a bit of side,' Temperley replied.

'What old customs did Rumbold's brother dig up?'

Ormsby asked.

'A lot of silly bunkum about making new fellows sing, and tossing them in a blanket if they can't get through a verse. And then he started the Pow-wow Club again, to which no one can belong unless he can talk sense for five minutes without stopping. Bingo made himself President and just walked in, but the only fellow who ever qualified properly was Rose.'

'Are you a member?'

Ormsby asked.

'Good gracious, no! Only ten fellows belong, and they are all bloods.'

'What a fearful ass Bingo is!'

Joe exclaimed, so emphatically that both Temperley and Ormsby laughed.

'He was a mighty fine athlete,' the former said eventually.

'Do you think we shall have to sing?'

Ormsby inquired.

'You may bet your boots you will,' Temperley assured him, and added that he must go.

'But, Pro, I never sing unless I'm miles away from everywhere. I can't sing a note, and I haven't brought my music with me.'

'Just bawl something—anything—only go on with it, and get it over quickly,' Temperley said as he opened the door.

'I like that fellow,' Joe immediately confided in Ormsby; 'but why do you call him "Pro"?''

'He used to be called "Tem," until someone thought "Pro" was better.'

'Oh, I see,' Joe remarked; and then the bell rang for the juniors to go to bed.

CHAPTER V

CLOSE QUARTERS

SOME days passed, and it became increasingly obvious that Rose was determined to treat Joe more as a Rumbold than as an utterly unimportant new boy. With all his—and Ormsby's—might Joe dodged Rose, and tried to show that he wanted no favours showered upon him. But Bingo was expected in Granby in a few days, and Rose meant to tell him how carefully Joe had been looked after.

Rose chose him as a fag, and then practically gave him nothing to do, and the latter was torn between a desire to do his share of the work, and an intense wish never to set eyes on Rose if he could help it. By a stroke of fortune Ormsby was Rose's other fag, and with the greatest cheerfulness in the world he put up with insults and unfairnesses, and was always ready to keep Joe hidden by any means he could imagine. In those early days Joe became really fond of Ormsby, finding him a true friend in days of trouble.

In the dormitory, however, Cole and Piper often spoke jeeringly of Rose to Joe; but although things had once or twice become rather lively, nothing warlike had actually happened. And then on the night before Bingo was said to be arriving, an explosion happened quite unexpectedly. Besides all the new

boys, the dormitory contained three fellows—Battersby, Crake, and Webster—who had been left over from the previous year. The fact that they had been chosen to remain in the junior dormitory was not exactly a testimonial in their favour, but since they had been at Granby for a year they naturally considered themselves—after bed-time—of considerable importance. Battersby was a typical Maxite; he had no mind worth mentioning and did not want any, but he had plenty of muscle and wanted to have more. Perhaps, considering that he could not remember anything out of a book, he was wise to devote himself entirely to feats of strength.

Every night before he got into bed he ‘pulled-up’ vigorously on his cubicle bar, and as soon as his arms were tired out he lay on his back and raised his legs until his gruntings and groanings resounded through the dormitory. As his great idea was to increase the number of these performances by one each night, Joe could not help thinking that he would eventually be found exercising himself in the early morning.

But Battersby had several good points. For instance, he had not the smallest desire for anyone else to imitate him, and the only way in which he showed that he was different from mere new fellows was by insisting that someone should frequently admire his muscles. He liked Arkwright to do this, because the latter was most honestly surprised at the size of them, and thought at first that Battersby had several deformities which ought to be removed.

Crake ought, so Battersby said, to have been at Bonham’s house. The Bonhamites had a reputation for being the best-dressed fellows at Granby, and Crake was a kind of languid swell who considered secretly that most of the Maxites were semi-barbarians. Sometimes he could not be bothered to

pull off his own socks, and sometimes he wanted a fellow to be astonished by a lot of flaming ties which he kept in a drawer. Arkwright again was generally chosen for these performances. Ormsby, when selected as sock-puller, promptly and rudely refused to pull off anyone's socks, and advised Arkwright not to do it. But although Arkwright was generally prepared to obey Ormsby, he refused on this occasion, because, as he explained to Joe, 'If I have got to be kicked by someone, I would rather be kicked by Ormsby than by Crake.'

Webster was a most extraordinarily solemn boy; he looked as if he had never seen or heard anything worth laughing at, but his face had an inquisitive expression. Joe and Ormsby agreed that this expression came from his constant search to find something amusing, but by the time they met him he must have despaired of success, for every night he wanted to be told a tragic tale.

Arkwright actually volunteered for this task, so after he had duly admired Battersby's muscles and been astonished by Crake's ties, he finished up by pouring a depressing tale into the ears of Webster. Fortunately for him, the same tale—with slight variations—was generally successful in sending Webster to sleep, and the first time on which he had any trouble was when he foolishly began a tale by Mr. Jacobs, and laughed while he was telling it. Then Webster jumped up in bed and asked several questions; hot, as it were, on the scent of something funny.

But the only results were that Mr. Jacobs was ultimately dismissed with ignominy, and that Arkwright returned to the same sad, old story, in which, at the end of a few nights, the characters were entirely new ones, for the sound reason that all the original ones had already been hanged, shot, or drowned.

The main difficulty was that although Webster liked the characters to meet some tragic fate, he also insisted that they should meet with accidental deaths. 'And,' as Arkwright complained to Ormsby, 'it is absurd for a man to be hanged by accident.' In fact, his only grievances against Webster were that he was not allowed to reproduce Mr. Jacobs, of whom he had never heard until he had become Ormsby's private pupil, and that someone had got to die every night.

Very different as Battersby, Crake, and Webster were in many ways, they were alike in remembering that they had emerged from a state of bondage, and that the rest of the dormitory had not. No boy can be said to come out of bondage at Granby until he has been there for a year, and if he is not a hewer of wood, he is, at any rate, a drawer of water for the baths of bloods.

No one in the dormitory was by title head of it, but Battersby, Crake, and Webster were really in command.

The trouble began on this evening from a variety of small causes. Battersby was angry because he had failed to add to his number of 'pull-ups,' Crake was sulky because his pinkest tie had disappeared, and Ormsby had dropped his collar-stud in the dormitory, and declared his intention of not going to bed until he found it.

No sooner had the lights gone out than Ormsby went into Joe's cubicle to borrow matches. Joe had once heard someone say that a sensible man always had matches, a knife, a piece of string, and a shilling in his pocket, so for his first term—or rather the first part of it—he always carried matches and a knife, not because he wished to be only semi-sensible, but because he thought the string was silly, and uncon-

trollable circumstances often compelled him to be without the shilling.

‘I’ve lost my collar-stud, and I want your matches,’ Ormsby said.

In response Joe growled, the growl being intended to mean that he was both asleep and angry—an impossible combination.

‘I say, don’t waste time by pretending you’re asleep; I can’t hunt for the wretched thing in the morning, and I can’t go to breakfast with my collar bulging round my neck,’ Ormsby continued, and began to prod the sleeper’s body.

Then Joe gave up the pretence of sleep, and merely tried to be angry. ‘Why isn’t the morning just as good a time to hunt for it as now?’ he asked.

Ormsby knew at least five good reasons why the morning was not the time to look for a collar-stud, and after he had given them he offered to rout in Joe’s pockets.

‘Perhaps you took them out of your pocket,’ he added.

‘I didn’t, because I never thought that anyone would be idiot enough to want them at night,’ Joe said.

‘It seems to be the ordinary time to want them,’ Ormsby returned.

This Joe denied because Ormsby said it as if he was sorry for him; besides, it was so irritatingly true that it had got to be denied. Eventually, however, Joe got out of bed and found the matches, and then, feeling exceedingly awake, he went to the entrance of his cubicle and looked out.

‘There’s moon enough without matches,’ he said to Ormsby, but the latter went on groping, and did not answer.

‘Haven’t you found it?’ Joe went on.

‘I’m not bargaining about on my hands and knees for fun ; you might come and help,’ was the answer.

‘It’s better than doing nothing,’ Joe said, and began to hunt.

While they were still groping Cole came out of his cubicle, and said that he wanted Arkwright to rub ‘Elliman’ into his back. At the time Arkwright was still engaged in pouring gloom over Webster, but Battersby was in the middle of the dormitory talking to Clive about Sandow, and Crake had button-holed Street, and was asking him if he had got his tie. Piper was lolling against his cubicle ; no boy ever lolled more superbly than Piper—he had made a fine art of it. Joe was the only boy in the dormitory who was fully pyjamaed.

Then Battersby suddenly trod with a bare foot upon the stud, to his wrath and Ormsby’s joy. But this put Ormsby out of employment, and gave him time to deal with other matters. He was already indignant at the number of things Arkwright had to do, and when Cole again said that he was waiting to have his back rubbed, Ormsby told him that he could rub his own back, for Arkwright was going to bed.

‘Arkwright isn’t a slave,’ he informed Cole.

‘No, he’s a worm ; but he’ll do to rub my back,’ was the reply.

Thereupon a crisp interchange of remarks followed, during which Webster stalked solemnly out of his cubicle. Directly afterwards all the fellows in the dormitory were clustered round Cole and Ormsby.

There was no mention of a fight, but at any moment one might have started, for Ormsby kept on repeating like a parrot that Cole was not going to bully Arkwright, while Cole grunted most aggressively. Really it was rather a ridiculous scene, and it might have

continued indefinitely had not Webster been spurred to push himself into the front of it.

'What Ormsby says is right,' he declared very gravely, 'though he is not the right fellow to say it. I dislike the smell of embrocation, and Cole must remember he is only a squealer, and not allowed to fag anyone.'

He spoke exactly like a judge passing sentence, and for a moment everyone stood and wondered if this was the end of what had promised to be something exciting. A mild titter from Ormsby, who was amused by Webster suddenly asserting himself, was the only sound heard in the dormitory; and then Cole addressed Webster.

'Go,' he said, 'and hide your gloomy face. You look like a churchwarden and talk like a blooming beak.'

It is difficult to understand why some people do not mind being churchwardens, while everybody resents being told that they look like them. At any rate it was the churchwarden part of Cole's reply which upset Webster.

'Churchwarden, churchwarden,' he mumbled; 'confound the fellow's cheek!' And then Cole made a lunge at Arkwright, who was standing next to Joe.

After that the scrimmage began, and it began so quickly that there was no time to think about sides. If it had been a first-class game of any kind, someone would have promptly appealed against the light; but there was nothing first-class about this encounter, nor, for that matter, were there any umpires to whom to appeal. At the beginning Ormsby and Joe kept as close as they could to Arkwright, for there seemed to be two balls in this fray, one of which was represented by Arkwright and the other by Cole. But very soon the idea of keeping near to anyone in par-

ticular was abandoned, and they just barged about, upsetting fellows and being upset.

When asked afterwards why they exercised themselves in this extraordinary manner, neither Joe nor Ormsby could give any reason. But they admitted that, once having started, they did not feel in the least like stopping.

'The whole thing,' Ormsby explained to Temperley, 'was rather like a dog-fight, in which a whole host of dogs suddenly go at it like mad without seeming as if they want to go for any particular dog. I wanted to get at Cole, and so, I suppose, did Webster; but everyone else just scrummed round, because somehow they had begun to scrum around.'

On this occasion the semi-darkness added to the fascination of the fray, and Joe was thick in the midst of a most determined scrimmage by the door, when he was suddenly hurled backwards and fell against something unexpectedly soft. As he went through space and imagined that he would bump with violence against wood or wall, he was momentarily relieved to find that his journey had ended against anything so pliant. Before, however, his joy was so to speak full, two arms embraced him. Such arms, Joe thought, could only belong to the massive Cole, the very fellow for whom he had been more or less looking during the last few minutes. And Joe was in no mood to be suffocated without a struggle.

Subsequently he was told that he was 'a mad idiot' and other cheerlessly redundant things of that kind, but it has to be remembered to his credit, or discredit, that his was a backward flight into this embrace, and that he had no chance to see by whom it was bestowed.

Anyhow, far from suffering it gladly, he did some pretty work with his heels, and tried to put up what

he considered to be a good fight. Indeed, so hard did he kick and wriggle, that his first suspicion that possibly he was not engaged in single combat with Cole was aroused by the sudden silence which had fallen over the dormitory.

Of course, Mr. Lomax could have simplified matters if he had cared to speak. But that was not Max's way; sometimes he behaved better, and sometimes worse than an ordinary master, but he prided himself upon never being usual.

As a matter of fact, the exciting part of this struggle for freedom from an embrace, which had developed rapidly into a squeeze, lasted a very short time, but when Joe thought of it every second seemed to have grown into a minute. Still, it is not given to every boy to spend even a second in a backheeled assault upon his housemaster's shins, nor is such an assault to be recommended. For Joe ended in a prone position upon the floor, in which Mr. Lomax kept him with a weighty foot until he had lighted the gas.

Then Joe saw both his mistake and also Ormsby groping about on his hands and knees. It did not seem quite the right moment to remind Ormsby that his collar-stud had been found, but what on earth he was looking for Joe could not understand.

Max treated Joe with contempt, which was as good treatment as any reasonable boy could expect under the circumstances. Briefly both he and Ormsby were told to go to bed. Not a single question did Max ask, but Joe saw him stoop and pick up two or three matches from the floor, and in the guilelessness of his heart he considered him a most tidy man.

After Max had gone everyone seemed to fight shy of appearing again in the open, but various combatants could be heard conversing plaintively with their injuries, and Joe also was told by Piper that

what had happened was due to his folly in not recognizing Max.

To this absurd charge Joe made no reply, for not only had he been in bed when Ormsby had come into his cubicle, but even if this was dismissed as a huge fluke, he could not see how he could be expected to recognize Max when he had been hurled backwards into him. But it just showed, he thought, that in a row Piper was the sort of fellow who looked round for somebody to take his share of the blame.

Conscious of many bruises, it was difficult to go to sleep, and he seemed scarcely to have shut his eyes when he found the recurrent Ormsby sitting on his bed.

'Go away,' Joe said; 'it's nothing like morning yet.'

'The blooming bell will ring in half an hour. It's broad daylight.'

'I'm not going to waste half an hour. I ache all over.'

'I came to see,' Ormsby told him.

There was no escape from such persistence, so Joe asked him why he was still on his hands and knees when Max lit the gas.

'I wanted to see the end; it seemed a bit rough to leave you to have a single with Max. I was picking up old matches, but he got a few.'

'I hope he'll like them,' Joe grunted.

'He might; he's an odd bird. You never know with Max.'

As Joe did not feel inclined to discuss his house-master at that early hour of the morning, he turned over to see if his other side ached a little less, but Ormsby did not remove himself.

'I should like to see what you look like after last night. Someone rammed his head into my left eye,' he said.

‘I feel like a damaged sausage,’ Joe groaned; and directly afterwards Battersby, Clive, and Street poked their heads into his cubicle.

The wish, indeed, to inspect the results of the engagement was so unanimous that in two minutes all the combatants were standing in the middle of the dormitory. That there was going to be a large list of injuries was very evident, but no one expressed a wish for details until Webster spoke.

‘Such a fight as this is never likely to happen again,’ he said, ‘and I vote we examine everyone, and choose some fellow to write down a proper report.’

‘I know a lot of medical words. My father is a doctor, and my mother a Christian Scientist,’ Arkwright remarked, and evidently meant this to be an application for the post of reporter.

‘And my governor is a coal-heaver, and my mother a policeman,’ Piper sneered, but as no one either laughed at or denied this statement it fell very flat.

Arkwright was at once told to get a pencil and a piece of paper, and for the first time Joe saw him really keen on the job he was doing. Webster, Crake, and Battersby appointed themselves inspectors, and in turn the others submitted themselves for examination. When the last boy had been inspected, Arkwright was told to read out his report:

‘*Street*.—Complained of contusion upon his back, but it was invisible to the naked eye. Some skin missing from left foot, but after close examination it was decided that the patient had been without this portion of cuticle for several days. Rather disappointing.

‘*Piper*.—Swollen nose. Claimed lump as big as an egg on his head, but only pea-size was allowed. Mr. Battersby thought that he had discovered black

bruise on right cheek, but this yielded quickly to soap and water.

' *Ormsby*.—Left eye very discoloured. Dr. Webster stated that it must have come into contact with some hard object. Cuticle missing from right ankle. Superficial wound on left arm. A bruise, in shape like a map of India, on back—the best bruise that had so far been exhibited. Altogether a most interesting case.

' *Clive*.—Claimed a tooth looser than it had been. Offered to prove this by pulling it out at once, but Mr. Battersby (surgeon) stated that such a demonstration would prove nothing, as no one knew how loose it had been before the engagement. Put forward a crick in the neck, and a scar which Dr. Webster announced to be a birthmark.

' *Harper*.—Complained of general soreness, contused toes, and a bruised shoulder-blade. Was given half marks for his blade, and a special diploma of merit for a big toe. Should be worth looking at when his bruises have had time to develop.

' *Clarkson*.—Stated that he had a cut lip and could not speak, and that his funny-bone was broken. Was rebuked by all the doctors for levity. Offered a strained muscle in left wrist as an apology, but the offer was not accepted. Upon investigation it was discovered that his knuckles were sore. Dr. Webster prescribed leeches.

' *Rumbold*.—Jumped about when prodded ; promises to be worthy of attention in a few days. Claimed mark for footprint of Max, but although Mr. Battersby thought that he could see the print, the physicians refused to allow claim. Attempt to claim mark for jelly-fish feeling also failed.

' *Arkwright*.—Showed his right heel, and pointed out that a heel can be bruised without anyone being

able to see it. No marks. Offered left ear for inspection with same result.

'*Cole*.—Head very bumpy and swollen; stated that it was always swollen, with which Dr. Webster promptly agreed. Several pieces of cuticle missing, but the patient declared that they were always missing. Severe buffet on right knee, for which the patient, in spite of protests that this limb was in its normal condition, was given full marks. Mr. Battersby prescribed cold fomentations.'

After Arkwright had finished reading his report, the inspectors set to work, and rapidly gave each other full marks for very doubtful bumps and bruises. Finally Battersby stated that he was first with six bruises, two disputed bumps and a dent, and as the time had come for the combatants to dress no one troubled to contradict him.

What, however, had astonished Joe most about the inspection was the spirit in which Arkwright had entered into it. The way in which the reporter had shown that, while nearly everybody was anxious to get as many marks as possible, Cole was determined not to acknowledge that he had suffered at all in the engagement, simply made Joe chuckle as he tried to button his collar.

But Joe's astonishment at Arkwright's sudden burst into life was far greater than Ormsby's; for during a portion of every day Ormsby had been quietly giving Arkwright instruction in how to behave at a public school, and however intensely Mrs. Arkwright would have disapproved of these lessons, it must be admitted that her son was beginning to be turned from a puling infant into a more or less normal boy. Another result of these lessons was that Arkwright conceived a great admiration for his instructor. But to worship Ormsby was a difficult task, because he

would not sit quietly on his pedestal and be properly adored.

'There's a lot to be done yet,' Ormsby said, when at breakfast Joe mentioned his surprise. 'He has lapses about twice a day. Forgets where he is and that kind of thing. But he's coming on. Just look at the fellows in our dormitory! They look more like the crew of a wrecked ship than the heroes of a fight. And I'm bothered if I can see anything out of one eye.'

The next moment Max descended upon the junior table, and told Battersby, Crake, and Webster to come and see him as soon as they had finished breakfast.

'That can't mean a licking,' Battersby said; 'but he's not in a good temper.'

Unless appearances were very deceptive, Mr. Lomax was certainly not in a good temper. He was, in fact, in his most restless and curt mood, and jumped about the hall, pouncing upon fellows, and saying 'What?' so snappishly when they did not understand his orders, that Ormsby said that it sounded like a succession of pistol-shots; but he added: 'I shouldn't wonder if he thinks that we are all battered enough already. It's the kind of sporting thing which might appeal to him.'

'Sporting!' Joe exclaimed scornfully, and felt a lump on his knee, which seemed to be getting lumpier every time he felt it.

'You've got to call it something, and "sporting" means most things. The best of a gigantic row is that it clears the air. If I was a housemaster, I should tell my house to have a regular bust-up every fortnight,' Ormsby continued.

'Then,' said Street from the other side of the table, 'I'm thundering glad you are not Max. As it is I believe I have got water on the knee, and my ribs

feel as if they had all been knocked into places which are too big to hold them. It is absolutely the limit to know that you have got ribs.'

'I expect what you have got,' Ormsby told him, 'are just growing-pains. Whatever happened to us at our last place was always a growing pain, unless you could show them a rash.'

'The trouble with my pain is that it keeps on growing, and if by any chance I should have to go up a place or two in class I shall be too stiff to move,' Street returned, and smiled placidly into his plate.

As Joe and Ormsby's room was nearest to the hall, it was shortly afterwards full of fellows waiting for the inspectors to return from interviewing Max.

So far Ormsby had got no further than talking about his 'scheme,' and the only additions that had been made to the room were two comfortable chairs and a few absolute necessities. Piper's criticisms of the furniture—or rather the lack of it—were pungent and rude, but in the general gabble they passed unnoticed, or at any rate unanswered.

Long before they were expected the trio returned, Battersby laughing, Crake trying to look important, and Webster succeeding in looking glum. In response to a fusillade of questions, Battersby answered that everyone in the dormitory had to learn the first thirty lines of the First Book of Virgil.

'I didn't understand that,' Crake said at once. 'I thought he said if it ever occurred again, we should have to learn something. What do you think, Webster?'

'He snapped out things at such a pace, I don't know what he said. He looked as if he was giving us something, but I don't know what it was, and I never heard anything about Virgil,' Webster replied.

'More did I. I'll bet he gave us nothing,' Crake said.

'Well, I'll bet he *did* give us something,' Battersby declared, 'and I'll tell you when he did it. It was just after he tripped over the rug and nearly fell on his nose.'

'Perhaps he was speaking to the rug,' Street suggested; but no one took any notice of such a frivolous suggestion, for there seemed to be a general feeling that definite information about Max's intentions ought to be obtained.

'All three of you ought to go and have another shot at him,' Piper said. 'We can't be expected to learn "rep" on the chance of Max being kind enough to hear it.'

'I'll toss odd man out to see who goes back,' Battersby said.

'I'm absolutely sure——' Crake began, but he was howled down. Battersby's offer appealed urgently to the meeting.

'Does the odd man go?' Webster asked.

It was agreed that this should be the fate of the odd man, and directly afterwards Webster turned up a tail, while Crake and Battersby turned up heads.

'Well, I suppose I've got to do it,' he said; 'but I don't believe I shall come out alive.'

He went off in anything but a hopeful spirit, and in a very few minutes returned looking more dejected than ever.

'Who was right?' Battersby asked, and seemed to be more inclined to learn 'rep' than to be wrong.

'When I went in I felt sure we hadn't to learn anything, but now I'm bothered if I know. And the worst of it is that he was in such a bait that I told him I understood what he had been saying. But I never understood a word from start to finish.'

‘But are we to learn any “rep”?’ was the general question.

‘I don’t know; you must please yourselves,’ Webster replied; and then just as he was leaving the room, he added: ‘I can tell you one thing, if we have to learn anything, it’s Horace, and not Virgil. I thought he said something about Horace, but I’m not sure.’

‘Good egg!’ Ormsby exclaimed; ‘no one but a raving lunatic can expect us to learn about a million lines of old Virgil and Horace on the chance of hitting the right bit.’

And with this they most fortunately left their punishment to look after itself, for Max never referred to it again.

CHAPTER VI

A WORK OF ART

DURING Joe's early days at Granby, Mrs. Rumbold frequently looked at a letter which she had received from Mr. Malcolm during the last holidays. Mr. Malcolm was the man who had been referred to contemptuously by Mr. Lomax, but if he had not paid very much attention to Joe's muscles, he had tried to train his mind. And, although Mr. Rumbold had spoken of this letter as 'Bosh,' it was at once the most pleasing and the most perplexing testimonial Mrs. Rumbold had ever received of any of her sons.

'DEAR MRS. RUMBOLD' (Mr. Malcolm had written), — 'It was very kind of you to thank me for anything we may have done here for Joe. I am very sincerely sorry to lose him, for in an exceptionally unostentatious way he has been of great service to the school. It always seems to me an impertinence to point out to parents the chief characteristics and qualities of their children, but it is also an impertinence which some parents insist upon, and you will forgive me if I am offending. Joe's chief fault, then, seems to me a fixed intention not to take his proper position. He seems to have a natural repugnance against taking the lead. This does not come from a lack of will-power, because he can be absolutely determined, and even obstinate, when his mind is made up; nor does it

come from slackness ; but it does come, I think, from a modesty which is neither normal nor thoroughly wholesome. He wants, I am sure, to conquer that at Granby. For the rest I have nothing but praise ; if it had been necessary, I am sure that he would have stood a very good chance of a scholarship at any public school, for he is really interested in and lives in his work. Accuracy is not, perhaps, his strongest point, but it is delightful to teach a boy who does not regard his classics as dull, dead things, and who has real humour and imagination. In respect to his school-work I am sure that you need have no fear that he will do extremely well.'

Mr. Malcolm's opinion, Mrs. Rumbold knew, was thoroughly honest and trustworthy, but, in spite of the pleasure it gave her, she recognized that 'humour and imagination' were not altogether the qualities which the Rumbolds were inclined to admire.

And, having read this letter once again, she turned to one she had received from Joe. 'I was top the first week, pretty easily top,' he said ; 'but Ormsby could lick my head off if he cared to try. He knows the oddest sort of things, but he is a real good sort when you get used to him. Arkwright hasn't blubbed much, but he blubs very easily, not so easily as he did. I've played footer two or three times, but am fairly hopeless, though one fellow called Rose keeps on saying I am awfully good. I can't stand Rose. Max is cracked on muscles, and my body disappointed him a lot ; Mrs. Max is most frightfully decent ; and Mr. Ridley, our class-master, is all right.'

Never before, as far as Mrs. Rumbold knew, had any of her sons been top of a form for a single week. Pads certainly had brought home a prize for mechanics, but he had explained this by saying that there were only five fellows in the class, and that three of

them had been absent during most of the term. A prize for anything but athletics required, so Mrs. Rumbold had thought, some explaining away at Maiden Croft.

Near as Joe and his mother were to one another in many ways, she had always found it impossible to get him to talk of himself, and when she had tried to talk to him of himself he had invariably tried to stop her by every imaginable trick. In some extraordinary way he seemed to be utterly uninterested in his own affairs. Once, and once only, before he had gone to Granby, had he spoken to her of his home, and then he had said that he was a round peg in a square hole. If he had been in the habit of complaining, she would have been relieved ; but he was just silent, rather lonely, but not unhappy, and under pressure ready to fight for his freedom against his brothers.

'My body disappointed him a lot,' Mrs. Rumbold repeated, and could not help smiling. It was so extraordinarily characteristic of Mr. Lomax that the first disappointment he expressed about a Rumbold should refer to the 'body.' Frequently Mrs. Rumbold had noticed in the school-lists that her sons' ages had been far above the average age of their classes, but at that Mr. Lomax had never complained. It seemed to her that he took it for granted that her sons must be fine athletes and poor scholars, and she feared with a whole heart that he would never understand Joe, nor Joe him.

But there was nothing for her to do at present ; she must just watch and try to help if help was needed, and at any rate she had the consolation of knowing that Joe thought his class-master 'all right.'

It was as well that Joe had written that opinion of Mr. Ridley, for on the morning following the battle

of the dormitory he had some reason to doubt whether his class-master was 'all right.' The class were 'up' for repetition, and Buckle, who wanted to be a wag and did not know how to be, was put on first, and tried to look as if his memory had suddenly vanished, but that it would return if only he was given a chance.

'That fellow was put on last time, and never expected to be stuck on again to-day. He doesn't know a word of it,' Ormsby whispered to Joe, who was next to him.

And Joe, with his eyes on Mr. Ridley, whispered back: 'Shut up; Buckle's making him baity.'

This would have stopped most fellows, but it only made Ormsby look at Buckle, and then chuckle.

'Non,' Buckle was saying, and then, not caring to risk much, he repeated it.

'He's clinging to old "non" as if it was a blooming life-belt,' Ormsby informed Joe, and Mr. Ridley nearly turned upon them.

'Non,' Buckle said for about the sixth time, and at last, thinking the time had come when he must leave safety, he added 'sequitur.'

'That's perfectly true and quite incorrect,' Mr. Ridley said, but as he often made remarks of that kind, Buckle only thought that his luck was better than usual.

'Non sequitur,' he continued, and thought of dropping his handkerchief in the hope that as he picked it up someone might tell him another word.

'Perhaps it's my eye being nearly bunged up, but Buckle looks to me just like a bottle-nosed baboon; do you see what I mean?' Ormsby continued.

'More like a kangaroo with a false nose,' Joe whispered back.

And Mr. Ridley, without so much as a glance in

his direction, said : ' Rumbold, you are talking incessantly ; come and speak to me at twelve o'clock.'

' Silly ass,' Joe muttered too loudly ; ' anyone might have seen he was ready to jump.'

Immediately afterwards Mr. Ridley also jumped upon Buckle, who retired to the bottom with impositions thick upon him, and this was the prelude to a very stormy morning. No one seemed able to satisfy the class-master, and the climax was reached when Masterman, who crumpled up like a rose-leaf when he was even looked at, was told that a well-trained parrot could talk better Latin prose than he wrote.

Altogether Joe had a fresh experience of Mr. Ridley during those few hours, and at twelve o'clock he approached him with confidence sadly shaken. For a moment Joe was looked at as if he had no right to be near the desk, and then he noticed that one side of Mr. Ridley's cheek was considerably bigger than the other side.

' Oh, you were talking ; then don't talk again,' Mr. Ridley said, and began to collect some papers.

Joe turned away from the desk, wondering whether such an all-powerful man could possibly be suffering from toothache—a complaint which he had often heard his father say was reserved for babies who ate sweets ; but as he turned he saw Ormsby marching towards him.

' What's up now ? ' he asked him. But Ormsby strode past with a resolute face—and Joe groaned. It was useless to ask what was ' up,' for that expression undoubtedly meant a relief expedition. The trouble with Ormsby was that he insisted upon relieving people who were not in need of relief.

' When,' he said, as soon as he had got within word-

fire of the desk, 'you told Rumbold that he was talking, sir, he wouldn't have talked if I hadn't asked him questions.'

Mr. Ridley looked as if he was trying to remember something, and then clapped a hand over his swollen cheek.

'Was it you,' he asked, 'who was foolish enough to call me a "silly ass"?''

After this question Joe began to hurry away, but before his retreat had become a rout he was called back.

Silence reigned around the desk, because Ormsby could not say 'Yes,' and did not want to say 'No.' He was, indeed, at a loss for words, which was a record of a kind, although Joe was in no mood to appreciate it.

'Don't you think, sir,' he said eventually, 'that Rumbold may have meant me?'

'Rumbold is here to answer that.'

'I did mean Ormsby, sir,' Joe announced.

'Then you can both go,' Mr. Ridley said.

'But——' Ormsby began.

'Go away, or I shall bump your heads together.'

'Sir——' Ormsby began again.

'Go, I tell you,' Mr. Ridley roared, and at last Ormsby was persuaded to retire.

'He's gone clean mad; ought we to leave him?' he said to Joe, when they were safely in the quadrangle.

'What's wrong with him is raging "toothers"; one side of his face looks like an apple-dumpling.'

'But how could we see that if he kept a great fist over it? I know the very thing for him: it's called "Sooval," and it burns like fury. I shall take him a bottle this afternoon.'

'He'll throw the bottle at your head, and probably

hit mine. The thing to do with a toothachy chap is to leave him alone. You're so precious busy,' Joe told him.

'I'm bothered if you haven't got "toothers" or something,' Ormsby replied, and turned abruptly into a lane which skirted several of the boarding-houses, and at the bottom of which stood a man with a basket of what William Rumbold called 'Indigestibilities.'

This man, familiarly known to hundreds of Granbeians as Billy the Blighter, was an institution. He had stood at the bottom of the lane for twenty-seven years, and remained until it was discovered that his interest in horse-racing was too infectious.

Joe had practically decided to interview Billy, but Ormsby's sudden departure upset his plans. So, unfed and alone, he went back to the house, and met Cole in the passage.

'I suppose you'll learn Max's stuff,' Cole said.

'What stuff?' Joe asked.

'Why, Max's stuff of course.'

'And why should you suppose I shall learn it?'

'Because it's the sort of thing you would do.'

'Is it?'

'Yes, it is.'

At this moment Rose passed through the passage, and told Joe that he wanted to speak to him; but Joe did not move.

'They'll put you in the first fifteen between them,' Cole sneered.

'I wonder,' said Joe slowly, 'why you try to make yourself such an awful beast. Do you happen to want to fight?'

'Fight you! I could put you in my pocket.'

'Try,' Joe said.

'And get licked by Palmer and Rose for touching

a Rumbold. Not good enough,' Cole replied; 'you'd better go and see Rose.'

'I'm not going to see Rose.'

'Such a swell that you don't obey prefects,' Cole continued.

And then Joe hit him.

There were no spectators to witness the struggle that followed, and it was as well for Joe that there were none; for, however plucky his attack was, he did not succeed in injuring Cole; and the latter, either from discretion or pity, certainly did not try to hurt him. For two or three minutes Joe battered furiously against what was to all intents and purposes a human mountain, and merely received some pushes in return. And then the ridiculousness of trying to hurt Cole occurred to him, and also the ignominy of being treated in such a way.

'It's no use; you're too big,' he said.

'I thought you'd find that out,' Cole replied.

'All the same,' Joe continued, and swallowed his pride, 'it was rather decent of you not to half-kill me.'

'Not worth it,' Cole sneered, and Joe's wrath rose again.

'Perhaps some day it may be worth it,' he said.

'I'll let you know when you're worth fighting,' Cole told him.

Then Joe went back to his room, and wondered what he had better tell Ormsby about this assault upon Cole. It was perfectly certain that as soon as Ormsby heard of it he would attempt to bring things to a head. And in this case his idea, Joe thought, would probably be to express his contempt for Cole in language which would be impossible to misunderstand. There never was anybody more anxious to bring things to a head than Ormsby; he had already

told Joe that it was the natural place for things to be brought to—what, in short, things were for.

Ultimately Joe decided that for the present he would not say anything about this affair; which was fortunate, because when Ormsby burst into the room he was far too excited to listen.

‘At last,’ he said, ‘I’ve got it. Can you lend me five-and-six, unless you’d like to be part-owner?’

Joe looked first at Ormsby and then at the parcel in his hand, but before he could reply Ormsby continued, as he cut the string: ‘I’ve been to that musty shop three times. The first time old Wedberg asked me two guineas, and I told him to talk sense. That knocked off two bob. The second time we began at two pounds, and separated at thirty-seven and threepence. That threepence tells you all there is to know about Wedberg. To-day I forgot the threepence at the start, and we haggled until I got him down to thirty-five and six. Then, though I’d only got thirty bob, I bought it.’

By this time he was holding his treasure away from him with both hands, and Joe saw that it was a picture.

‘Come and look at it,’ he said.

‘Stick it down here,’ Joe replied, and pointed to his desk.

‘You can’t see it close to; you ought really to be half blind to see a thing like this properly,’ he returned, and objected to the way in which Joe laughed.

‘Did you really give thirty-five bob for this?’ Joe asked, when he had inspected it.

‘And six, and it’s jolly cheap. Now I’m stone-broke, except for a few stamps, three newspaper-wrappers, and a postcard.’

The picture was a water-colour of the Granby School buildings, with a few trees and a lot of magenta clouds thrown in, and as soon as Joe glanced at it he

suspected that he was gazing at an old friend. But before he said anything he wanted to be more certain, so he looked in the corner of the masterpiece, and there he discovered what he half wanted and half feared to find.

‘W. R.,’ he said, and pointed to the initials.

‘Yes,’ Ormsby replied gaily. ‘Old Wedberg says it was painted by a German called Wilhelm Rudesheimer, a fellow who would have made no end of a name, only he died. All good artists die young and become famous afterwards, so Wedberg says. Ever heard of him?’

‘No,’ Joe answered; ‘but I’ve heard of William Rumbold, because he’s my cousin.’

‘As far as that goes I’ve heard of William Rufus, but unless you had crammed your cousin down my throat I should never have mentioned him. What on earth has your cousin got to do with it?’

‘He painted it.’

‘Rats!’ Ormsby replied briefly.

‘He painted it,’ Joe repeated, ‘when he was here, several years ago, and he gave it to Flip, who gave it to Jumpy, and Jumpy gave it to Pads, who gave it to Bingo. Pads left it at home while he owned it, because he doesn’t like pictures.’

‘He’s got no taste,’ Ormsby said, without much conviction. ‘Bingo brought it back here again, because he said that he might be able to sell it,’ Joe continued; and Ormsby began to look very serious.

‘Do you know any more?’ he asked, and picked up the paper in which the picture had been packed.

‘I heard Bingo say this holidays that he had sold it for five shillings, and although he tried to get more, because it had got a frame and was an heirloom, the man declared it wasn’t worth eighteen-pence.’

‘The frame’s worth ten bob, at least,’ Ormsby

said, as if he wanted someone to deny it; and then he added: 'You aren't rotting, are you?'

'No,' Joe answered; and without another word Ormsby straightened out the paper, and laid the picture upon it.

'What are you going to do?' Joe asked.

'I'm going to pay my fourth and last visit to that Wedberg fellow,' he replied, and having tied up the picture, he put it under his arm.

'There are twenty minutes before dinner, ten to get there and back, and ten to make the little swindler's hair stand on end, and to get my money out of him,' he continued.

'I'll come,' Joe told him.

'Good egg! but his dirty little shop is out of bounds.'

'We'll risk it,' Joe said, for he did not mean to miss the next stage in the history of this picture.

Wedberg's shop was in a little back street, and was stacked full of apologetic-looking odds and ends.

A few dilapidated brass candlesticks and a chipped Toby jug were in the window; but as soon as a customer entered the door he passed into a gloomy region, in which the light was depressingly dim and the atmosphere peculiarly musty.

Joe looked round the shop, while Ormsby untied the parcel and kicked hard upon the counter until Mr. Wedberg appeared.

'I've brought back your picture, and I want my money; I've discovered that I like my money better than your picture,' Ormsby said, and handed over the parcel for Wedberg to take.

But the former owner would have none of it.

'Ach!' he exclaimed; 'but a thale's a thale.'

'You told me lies. Hand over my thirty bob, and I'll say no more about it,' Ormsby told him.

'I thay to you, no, my good boy. A thale's a thale, I thay nothing else.'

'And a swindle's a swindle,' Ormsby declared; 'and unless you give me back my thirty bob, I'll take something for my money. I'll pocket everything small enough, and I'll smash whatever I can't pocket. You won't dare to stop me, because you've told me lies;' and he kicked the counter so hard that he hurt his toes.

'Thery thoon I fetch a policeman; I thay no lies to you. My dinner 'e waits for me.'

'Look here, Mr. Wedberg,' Joe began, as Ormsby turned towards the window, 'I know all about that picture.'

'It is a thery beautiful picther,' Wedberg interrupted, 'Wilhelm Rudesheimer—'

'Oh, stow Rudesheimer!' Joe shouted, and proceeded to give his history of the picture, while Wedberg at the same time gave his. When the clamour had abated, Joe looked round, and saw that Ormsby had collected a large heap of miscellaneous rubbish, and the sight of all these battered and useless things made Joe excessively anxious to avoid having them in his room.

Mr. Wedberg had already been reduced to guttural exclamations and much brandishing of his arms, but as he showed no sign of producing any money Joe again addressed him, and Ormsby continued to add to his collection.

'No thenth, no thenth whatever! You tell me I tell you lies; I tell you you tell me lies,' Wedberg kept on saying; but when Joe finally offered to give him ten shillings for the picture, he was so anxious to get back to his dinner and to get rid of the industrious Ormsby, that he accepted the offer.

Slowly he counted out twenty separate shillings,

and when he handed them over, he said: 'Let me not thee you inthide 'ere again. A thale's a thale.'

Without any delay Joe picked up the picture, and hurried down the street.

'Why the dickens did you give him ten bob for it?' Ormsby asked.

'Why did you give him thirty?' Joe not unnaturally replied.

'It was a good picture then, but now we know it isn't. I don't see what we are to do with it.'

'We might send it to the man who painted it,' Joe suggested.

'And serve him jolly well right! We'll send it——'

They were turning a corner as Ormsby was sentencing William Rumbold, and on the other side of the street Mr. Lomax was engaged in talking to two ladies. He was not, however, engaged enough to miss seeing Ormsby and Joe, and before they had advanced fifty yards he had caught them up.

'What are you doing out of bounds?' he asked, and it was a peculiarly annoying question, for the fact was that as soon as they had turned the corner they were once more in bounds. This, however, was a fact which neither of the culprits thought prudent to mention, and as Max did not receive an answer to his first question, he promptly asked them another.

'What's that? Something disreputable, for certain,' he said, and snatched at the cause of the trouble, which Joe now had the privilege to carry.

In their haste the heirloom had not been properly tied up, and when Mr. Lomax seized it, the paper came off and floated wantonly down the street. In all its beauty (or the reverse) the picture was revealed for any passer-by to admire or condemn.

For quite a minute Mr. Lomax tried to look as if he was trying to find something 'disreputable' in

it, and Joe doubted if his purchase had ever before received so much attention. But Mr. Lomax's expression did not soften as he gazed at it, and, happily, his first remark was not made in the presence of the painter.

'Where did you buy this atrocious caricature of Granby?' he asked.

Joe told him.

'How much did you pay for it?'

Again Joe supplied the information required.

'Then take it back to the shop and tell the man he is to give you back your money. Tell him that your housemaster refuses to allow anything so hideous in any of his rooms.'

At this point Joe knew—from gurgles—that Ormsby was temporarily put out of action by hopeless laughter, so he endeavoured to appease Mr. Lomax's wrath by the only means he could think of.

'A relation painted it, sir, and that's why I bought it,' he said.

'A relation—a Rumbold painted that!' Mr. Lomax exclaimed, and it was characteristic of him to forget that Joe might very possibly have relations who were not Rumbolds.

'Yes, sir,' Joe told him.

'Do you mean to tell me that one of your brothers can *paint*?'

'No, sir; my cousin, William Rumbold, painted it.'

'Oh, William Rumbold! He might do anything,' Mr. Lomax said, and seemed to be much relieved.

By this time they were walking towards the house, and after Mr. Lomax had handed back the picture, he looked at his watch.

'You have both been out of bounds, and you are

already twelve minutes late for dinner. I shall see you this evening.'

'It's all my fault again,' Ormsby said, when Max had left them, 'and I'm sorry I couldn't help laughing. The least I can do is to give you the picture.'

'But we have got to take it back,' Joe said, and laughed until tears rolled down his cheeks.

'Not a bit of it! It's become valuable again now Max says we aren't to have it. We'd better go in to dinner.'

CHAPTER VII

MAX THE INSCRUTABLE

ORMSBY was never a martyr to melancholia ; but good as his spirits almost invariably were, they were never better than when the outlook was cloudy and ' things were going to happen.' Without exaggeration, it may be stated that he honestly looked forward to his interview with Max, and when Joe and he had come back from afternoon school he said so.

' I can't stand the man ; he gives me the jumps,' Joe replied.

' I shouldn't be sure about that, if I were you,' Ormsby said quite seriously. ' I don't believe he's the sort of man to fall on the neck of a fellow who doesn't like him.'

' I don't want him to fall on my neck,' Joe declared.

' When Max falls, I should say he'd fall pretty heavily, and I'd rather he fell on my neck than anywhere else,' Ormsby returned.

' Do you like him ? '

' He has his points, but they are jutty. If you could get him down and sit on him, I shouldn't wonder if you found him quite a decent sort underneath. He ought to be tethered so that we could all stand round and look at him, but even then his mind would be skipping and jumping about all the time. I think I shall write the Life of Max. He ought to send for

us in about five minutes. I might get a whole chapter out of this, if we can only remember it.'

'We are more likely to feel it,' Joe said.

'You want cheering up. Have some chocolate cake?' Ormsby suggested.

Joe approved of this remedy, and was still applying it when Steel—Mr. Lomax's butler—knocked apologetically upon the door.

'Mr. Lomax would like to see Mr. Rumbold,' he said.

'And me,' Ormsby added, and jumped up at once from his chair. Joe's mouth was too full of remedies for him to speak.

'I have no orders concerning you, Mr. Ormsby,' Steel replied, and stroked his side whiskers.

'Pull yourself together and think a bit. You'll remember Mr. Lomax wants me badly,' Ormsby told him.

'Not so far as my orders go, and I should advise Mr. Rumbold not to keep Mr. Lomax waiting,' was the reply.

'It will be your turn afterwards,' Joe said, by way of encouraging the disappointed Ormsby.

'It won't be half such sport going alone,' the latter complained, and started to accompany Joe on his way. Indeed, had it not been for Steel's absolute refusal to allow Ormsby to go any farther than the hall, Joe would not have arrived by himself in Mr. Lomax's study.

Joe found his housemaster standing with his back to the fire, and with his legs stretched far and wide.

'Sit down,' Mr. Lomax said, and pointed to a chair which was directly in front of him. Then he stared hard at Joe, and the latter had time to realize in what an extremely uncomfortable position he was placed.

To begin with, he had no table under which he could place his legs ; the chair was, as it were, an island unsurrounded by furniture, and every time he fidgeted his fidgets could be seen. Then he was sitting down, while Mr. Lomax was standing up—a supremely disconcerting state of affairs. In all the illustrations which Joe had seen of a boy being interviewed by a master, the boy was standing up and the master sitting down.

Something went very wrong with the start of this interview ; in fact, for an appreciable time it did not start at all. During this æon Mr. Lomax looked at Joe, and the latter looked anywhere—at Max, at the windows, to both sides of his chair to see if by any chance he could shuffle to a less isolated spot. And when his housemaster broke the silence, he did not really say anything.

‘ Well,’ was his first word ; but although Joe could not reply to it, he greeted it with relief, and tried to brace himself for the approaching combat. But in his wildest dreams he had not anticipated what was coming.

‘ I have,’ Max continued, ‘ known your brothers thoroughly, and I can safely say that I have never been so angry with any of them as I was with you when you kicked at me. You were in considerable danger of being severely hurt.’

Joe’s panic must be held partly accountable for the fact that he missed the right reply to this opening. He ought, as he acknowledged to Ormsby afterwards, to have thanked Max warmly for not hurting him. What, however, he did say was : ‘ I did get hurt ; I still ache in places.’

‘ And I am exceedingly glad to hear it,’ Mr. Lomax added immediately. As regards sympathy, it was evident to Joe that he had drawn blank, but before

he could do more than feel one of his bruises Max was talking again, and an entirely fresh trouble had appeared upon the horizon.

'Of the noise in your dormitory I am not going to speak now ; there is something far more serious between you and me than a ridiculous ebullition of animal spirits,' he said, and as he spoke his eyebrows twitched most bewilderingly.

Joe sought eagerly to think of any serious offence that he had committed, and his search brought him to the picture which was in his study. Of course the picture, he tried to persuade himself, must be the trouble, and yet Max was making such a mystery of the affair that Joe was not by any means sure.

Slowly Mr. Lomax abandoned his straddling attitude, and, having rearranged himself, he put his hand into a waistcoat pocket and produced a match.

This he held up in front of him so that Joe could not help seeing it, but to volunteer any information was not the game between master and boy as he understood it. Besides, how, he asked himself, was he to know that this match had ever belonged to him? And, even supposing that it had, how was he to explain the reason why matches were lying about in the dormitory?

The situation was undoubtedly unpleasant, and was not made less so by the constant twitching of Max's eyebrows ; but all the same Joe deemed that to show any marked interest in this match would be a mistake. So he tried to look as if this sudden appearance had nothing whatever to do with him.

'I advise you,' Mr. Lomax said, 'to make a clean breast of it. I want to hear the truth.'

Many boys have listened to such a remark, and have resented it. Mr. Lomax assumed that even if Joe spoke the truth he would find it difficult to do so,

and this unfair assumption stirred Joe's temper, and gave him courage to face his fate.

'What do you want to know, sir?' he asked.

At this question Mr. Lomax looked indignant and a little surprised, but to give a history of that match until he was obliged was not a part of Joe's programme.

'I want you of your own accord to make a clean breast of it. Then I hope to make you see that you have disgraced your name,' Mr. Lomax told him.

They were getting on, Joe thought—slowly, it was true, but still progressing. For he knew now that he was expected to make a confession extensive enough to disgrace the name of Rumbold. The difficulty of having nothing important to confess remained, but he resolutely determined to do his best.

'Do you mean, sir, that the match in your hand once belonged to me?' he asked.

'I mean a good deal more than that. I advise you to be careful, and not to keep anything back,' was the reply.

He was, Joe considered, more than a little hard to please, for, after all, one wooden match was very like another, and this might possibly have belonged to someone else. If, however, nothing was to be kept back, the best thing to do was to empty his pockets. So, still continuing his policy of peace, Joe produced his box of matches, and got up to hand it to Mr. Lomax.

But this movement was nipped in its earliest bud.

'Remain seated,' Mr. Lomax commanded, with a wave of his matchless—if it may be so described—hand.

Joe sat down again abruptly, and, being utterly unable to think of anything else to do, he began to talk.

'I am sorry, sir, that you found some matches lying

about in our dormitory ; the reason was that we were looking for a collar-stud. They were my matches, but I did not know that there was a rule against having them, and until we have electric light in our rooms I don't see how we can do without them."

The reference to electric light was a venture, because Temperley had said that it was always coming, and never came. But, with Mr. Lomax's eyes fixed upon him, Joe could not make a fine choice between what to say and what to omit.

'Matches are not forbidden,' Max returned, and as far as Joe could see the trouble was ended. It was true that his housemaster still looked more bellicose than peaceable, but the fact remained that Joe had made 'a clean breast of it.' Such a clean breast, indeed, that not a single particle was left upon it.

'Now kindly continue,' Max added, as Joe sat and wondered.

'I can't think of anything more to say,' was the answer.

'Why do you always carry matches about with you? You do not need them in your dormitory.'

Joe sprung to attention at once, and poured forth his tale about the shilling, the knife, and the piece of string. But the reception given to the tale was, to say the least of it, chilly.

'Where is your piece of string?' Max asked.

'Here is my knife,' Joe replied; 'I've given up the piece of string because I thought it stupid.'

'No more stupid than your story,' Max retorted with uncommon vigour. 'I will give you one more chance out of respect for your father and brothers.'

Most people, presumably, are glad to be given another chance, but, all the same, it is a present that may have considerable drawbacks attached to it. In Joe's case he had not the smallest idea what to do with

it, so he pondered over this gift until Max disturbed his meditation.

'Are you going to tell me the truth, or must I tell it to you?' he demanded.

'I have told you the truth about the matches; if it is the picture——'

'That daub!' Max interrupted; 'but you remind me of William Rumbold in the way you refuse to be straightforward.'

The sudden attack upon his cousin thoroughly astonished Joe, for of all the aggressively straightforward people in the world William Rumbold stood among the first and foremost. Even Mr. Rumbold, who was perpetually annoyed by William, had often said of him: 'Whatever he is—and he's a crank and a family nuisance—I admit that he is honest.'

Such an admission was in its way a very handsome testimonial, and, though surprised, Joe was not in the least troubled by his straightforwardness being likened to his cousin's. In fact, he did not believe that his honesty was anything like as great as the family nuisance's, for so weary was he of this prolonged interview that, had he known what his sin was supposed to be, he was almost ready to admit it for the sake of peace.

When, however, he was at last charged with it, his denial was prompt and emphatic.

'I will give you one more minute,' Mr. Lomax said.

'It's no use, sir, because I can't think of anything else,' Joe replied; but nevertheless he was given a long minute before Max addressed him.

'You smoke,' he said.

'I don't,' Joe replied so quickly that had not Max lost his patience he must have guessed that this answer was the precise truth.

'It is no use to deny it, for I have proofs on this mantelpiece,' said Mr. Lomax, and jerked his head.

'I do deny it, because it is not true,' Joe returned, and his temper accompanied Max's to the place where lost tempers are stored.

'Perhaps you will also deny that this is yours,' Max said, and picked up one of those small leather cases which hold a lot of convenient—and inconvenient—things.

'No, sir ; that is mine,' Joe said, and felt very much inclined to ask him what he was doing with it.

'And you still deny that you smoke ?'

'Yes.'

'Then look at this.'

Joe got up, and, having inspected the case as Max held it open in his hand, he was amazed to see a lot of penny stamps, a postal order, some postcards, a photograph of his brothers, and two rather battered-looking cigarettes. Until that moment he had not suspected that he was so rich, but pleasant as it was to find this wealth, he also had a disquieting feeling that Max was too angry to believe the explanation of it.

'What have you got to say to these ?' Mr. Lomax asked, and pointed to the cigarettes.

Joe waited for a few seconds to prepare his defence, and by the delay confirmed his housemaster's suspicions.

'Just before I left home Pads gave me that case. He just shoved it into my pocket, and I forgot all about it and haven't looked at it until now. It was jolly——' He was going to say that Pads was a good sort to have given him a present without giving him a chance to thank him, but Max was too impatient to listen any longer.

'You confess that you always carry matches, and

the servant who cleans out your room tells me that there has been a smell of smoke in it for several days,' he interrupted.

'If they smelt anything funny, it must have been an old pastille we burnt for fun. Will you come and smell for yourself, sir?' Joe inquired.

But this nasal invitation was curtly refused.

'I have no reason to disbelieve my informant,' Max added.

'You have no reason to disbelieve me,' Joe retorted. And he spoke very rudely, for he had arrived at the point when a climax of any kind could only be a relief.

There seemed, however, to be several reasons why he should not be believed, and he had to listen both to them and to a fearful lecture upon the evils of smoking before the climax was reached.

'How,' Max asked, 'can you ever hope to equal the records of your brothers if you give way to obnoxious habits which destroy your physical development?'

Innumerable questions of this kind were put to Joe, but Max never stopped for an answer to any of them, and utterly wrong as he was in his suppositions, it was impossible not to recognize that he was almost feverishly eager for the last of the Rumbolds to be a credit to the house.

In the midst of his fury at being branded as a teller of lies, Joe realized that this chastening came from a whole-hearted, if thoroughly misguided, desire for his physical welfare.

In the end he leant over a table, while Max impressed the interview upon him. It seemed that both Pads and Bingo had required correction while they were still squeaklings, and, unfortunately for Joe, the result had in each case been successful. From what Max

told him, he understood that in any case he would have been beaten during his first term, if only to keep up the least distinguished of the Rumbold records.

But Joe left his housemaster's study with the feelings that to belong to such a family, and to have such a man to guide him in the way that he should go, were burdens grievous to be borne. And apart from refusing to believe him, Max had also, either with or without intention, kept the stamps, post-cards, and postal order.

When Joe returned to his room he found that Ormsby had been beguiling the period of waiting by preparing a surprise. Every piece of furniture they possessed had been moved into a different place, the picture had been hung in a most conspicuous position, and an empty bird-cage was hanging over the window.

'You have been such a time I had to do something. You can shunt it all back again while I'm with Max. Is he in much of a bait?' Ormsby asked, and started towards the door.

'He doesn't want you—at least he didn't say so. Where the dickens did you get that thing?' Joe replied, and pointed to the cage.

It was difficult to persuade Ormsby that Max did not want to see him, but when he at last was made to understand that his interview was, at any rate, postponed, he said that the bird-cage was a bigger bit of luck than he had ever expected it to be.

'But what's the good of it unless you stick a bird in it?' Joe asked.

'In a way, it's a sort of help to the picture. I'm getting to like that picture, and when Max sees the cage hanging over our window—and he can't help seeing it from his garden—he'll bounce in here and think we've got a tame bird. Then he'll find we

haven't, and there's no rule against hanging up an empty bird-cage. However, we will give him the cage if he wants it, and then we shall be allowed to keep the picture. That's how I argued it out ; don't you think it's sound ? '

Joe shook his head, and Ormsby continued :

' You're feeling like that now, and you might tell me what happened while I was letting off steam in here. I should have been trying to get into Max's study if I hadn't kept myself busy.'

' Max is mad, and if he says there is a bird in that cage he will believe there is one. And we shall catch it hot,' Joe said, and, taking Ormsby's cushion, he put it on the top of his own.

' Has he been beating you ? ' Ormsby inquired.

' He has, and you'd better bury that cage quick. He's got his eye in, and is short of exercise.'

For a few minutes Ormsby was more or less incoherent, but eventually he summed up the situation. ' He has beaten you for smoking when you haven't smoked, he's bagged your pocket-book which is stuffed full of bullion, and he needs watching. As I can't go to him, I'm bothered if we don't bring him to us. It's the only thing to do.'

Whereupon Joe protested that he had no wish to see Max again for a very long time, but Ormsby was too rebellious to listen to any protests.

' He can't beat you twice on one night. He's off on the wrong tack, and goodness knows where he'll wander to unless he's pulled up. It isn't as if he can't be all right when he is shown the way, but he wants training,' was the reply.

The idea of living in the same room with a companion ambitious enough to undertake the training of Max gave Joe a cold feeling down the spine. It was impossible, however, to tell for certain whether Ormsby

was serious or not, for he almost contradicted what he said by the comical way in which he spoke.

'There's the bell ; let's do some work and give Max a rest,' Joe said.

'In half a minute,' Ormsby agreed, and poked his head into the cupboard. On ordinary occasions he was inclined to treat crockery as if it were made of iron, but now that he was both hurried and reckless, he tossed things about as if he was trying to smash as much as he could in the shortest possible time. At last he emerged with a large wax candle, and a tin thing which was not very unlike a bird.

'At the sixpenny-halfpenny bazaar,' he said, as he held up the piece of tin.

Then he lit the candle, and after some difficulty got it firmly stuck in the cage.

'He's going to see that all right ; he can't miss it if he looks out of his study window. And if he doesn't see the candle he'll hear this.'

Producing a key he thrust it remorselessly into the body of the bird, and after expressing disgust that it had not been properly oiled, he succeeded in winding it up and placing it triumphantly on his desk.

'It's just like a canary,' he managed to say before the bird practically took possession of the room.

Joe had heard some bad noises in his life, but never had he listened to one which more instantaneously made him put his hands over his ears. There was, however, no getting away from that canary when it was properly wound up and going. It trilled, squeaked, and warbled until even Ormsby felt compelled to suffocate it with a cushion. But it was an extraordinarily long-winded bird, and some of its last and muffled notes were the worst of all. Ormsby called them 'pathetic,' a description with which Joe did not agree.

A mighty peace filled the room when the canary had ceased, and footsteps were heard in the passage.

‘Here come a few prefects,’ Joe said.

‘Probably Armitage; they say he’s musical,’ Ormsby replied.

But whoever had come out to locate this noise was content to return to his room as soon as it had stopped, and Ormsby at once began to say that the canary had been out of form because it had been out of practice.

Leaning down and removing the cushion, he regarded the bird intently and then said that it was only fair to give it a chance, to which Joe replied that it was fairer to give him one.

‘Just once more,’ Ormsby entreated, ‘and if that doesn’t fetch Max I’ll put it to bed.’

After this they had a long discussion, which ended in a compromise. The bird was to be half wound up, and if it was as full of bad noises as it had been it was to be promptly suffocated, but this latter part of the agreement was the cause of more dissension.

For no sooner had the canary got its head than Ormsby declared that it was in much better form, while Joe protested that it was worse than ever. They were still disputing about the merits of the performance when the bird gave an expiring gurgle, and Palmer, West, and Armitage entered the room. Behind them were several boys, whose studies had been seriously interrupted by Ormsby’s love of sound.

‘Are you making this abominable row?’ Palmer asked.

‘The first time I heard it I thought a dozen cats were fighting,’ West said.

At this moment Rose arrived, and pushed himself to the front. ‘Is someone hurt?’ he inquired.

Among the multitude of curious fellows Ormsby and Joe sought refuge in silence.

‘What’s that cage doing there with a candle in it? You’ll burn the whole place down in a minute,’ Armistage said.

Joe looked at Ormsby and for the cause of the trouble, but the canary had suddenly disappeared. If, however, Joe imagined that the bird was going to be disowned, he was very much mistaken, for Ormsby was enjoying himself thoroughly in his own peculiar way, and intended to prolong the entertainment. Walking slowly to the cage he blew out the candle and produced the canary. Then he put the bird in the cage and closed the lid.

For sheer idiocy Joe considered that this performance deserved a gold medal, but there was such a squash in the room that it was difficult for anyone except Palmer and Rose to see what Ormsby had done. Palmer, however, who was short-sighted, put on his glasses and fairly gazed at the bird.

During this inspection Joe saw Ormsby almost doubled up with laughter, but Rose had at once discovered the canary’s material, and began to denounce the whole thing as the biggest piece of impudence he had ever heard or seen. A conclusion with which, after he had poked the bird with a pen, Palmer was inclined to agree.

‘This noise must not occur again; you have disturbed everybody,’ the latter said, and Joe thought that the head of the house was extremely merciful.

But Rose was as bitter as Palmer was mild. Disregarding Joe altogether, Rose turned upon Ormsby and was very loquaciously rude. In return Ormsby neither denied nor admitted anything, but by his expression he managed to show that he did not consider the affair to be any of Rose’s business.

Rose, however, had a finger in every pie made in Max's house ; in fact, it may be said that he generally both thought of the pie and mixed it, and in this case Ormsby ate it.

Under orders from Palmer not to repeat their offence, the delinquents at length found themselves alone, and Joe congratulated Ormsby on having escaped so lightly.

'Something will have to be done with that man Rose. He's a nuisance, and will have to be removed,' Ormsby replied.

Whereupon Joe suggested that the reformation of Max and the removal of Rose was a double event too strenuous for them to tackle. But Ormsby, having apparently forgotten all about Max, insisted that Rose needed all the attention that they could give him. A policy with which Joe heartily disagreed, for his chief wish both in respect to Rose and Max was to avoid them at all costs.

CHAPTER VIII

A HOST IN HIMSELF

DIRECTLY preparation was over, Joe's congratulations turned out to be premature; for Ormsby was summoned to Palmer's room, and given another lecture by Rose and a beating by Palmer. Far, however, from being depressed by this display of authority, he returned from it with his mind full of what he called 'ideas,' but so very impossible were they that an attempt to carry out even a small proportion of them was, Joe thought, bound to end in absolute disaster.

Neither the reformation of Max nor the removal of Rose was perplexing him when he went to bed that night, for his thoughts were entirely occupied with the problem of how to restrain Ormsby.

At his private school Joe had worked hard under most of his masters, and had played games well enough to stop anyone, outside his own family, from despising him, and badly enough to prevent anyone from being jealous of him.

In fact he had spent a very happy time, and if some prophet had warned him that a sea of troubles was waiting for him at Granby, he would have politely told his informant that he was talking rubbish.

The only difficulty which he had foreseen was that he might be expected to be much better at games

than he was, but he had imagined that the dullest fellow living would take less than a week to discover that he was only a Rumbold by name. In his secret heart of hearts he had even cherished a hope that his lack of skill at games might be strange enough to be pleasant to those who knew the Rumbold records.

Instead of this, however, he had found Max almost insanely anxious about his muscles, and had heard Rose say that he only needed a little more strength in his legs to be a 'really nippy half-back.'

Rose's imagination and Max's anxiety were troublesome enough, but in addition he, in partnership with Ormsby, was already starting upon a very different kind of life from the one that he had contemplated. Altogether things were moving furiously fast and in the wrong direction, and on the night of this busy day Joe went to his dormitory full of a determination to curb Ormsby's activities, and thereby to secure for himself freedom and peace.

Nothing less than an entirely new life was Joe's programme, and as he lay in bed and wondered how he could persuade Ormsby that they had made a false start, he imagined that the task in front of him was going to be a gigantic one. He rehearsed both his own part and Ormsby's in the coming struggle, and in the end Ormsby was to be convinced by the cold facts which were put before him.

It was, however, to be a hard-won victory, and as Ormsby was as adaptable as he was reckless, he would doubtless have played his part properly had he known what was expected of him. But without any knowledge of Joe's ambition to lead a new life, and of the trouble that had been taken over thinking it out, he knocked all the wind out of Joe's sails at the very start.

The canary had occupied so much of the time for

'prep,' that they returned from morning school with impositions thick upon them. To spend a fine afternoon in writing impositions for Mr. Ridley was a nuisance, but for once Joe welcomed a nuisance with open arms. It was to be, as it were, the text of his sermon. But he had barely begun to preach when Ormsby interrupted him.

'You talk sense and I play about like a half-baked baboon,' he said; 'you go in for the quiet life and all that sort of thing, and I'll give myself a rest-cure.'

This sudden submission startled Joe, but it did not satisfy him.

'I heard Temperley say this morning that we were the two best sportsmen in the place. What he meant was that we were idiots,' Joe remarked.

'I'm not so sure about that,' Ormsby protested.

'I'm plumb sure, because Armitage told him that he meant idiots, and he said that he supposed he did.'

'I am disappointed with Pro; he must be spoken to,' Ormsby returned, and continued gaily to cover imposition paper.

Every now and then he stopped to suggest plans for the suppression or reformation of somebody. But after each suggestion he remembered that he had sentenced himself to a rest-cure, and offered apologies to Joe.

By the end of an hour Joe's temper had been restored to its normal condition, for Ormsby, having passed sentence upon himself, was already at work to find expedients for beguiling a dull time. What he ought and what he ought not to be allowed to do while he was resting was the subject of his inquiry, and if he interrupted Joe's labours he also enlivened them.

Some fellows who lived in double rooms at Granby were perpetually squabbling about trifles—the washing-

up of the tea-things, each other's voices, whose turn it was to put the coal on—but it was impossible to quarrel with Ormsby about such matters. Indeed, as a room companion he was absolutely perfect—when he was not trying to put someone else right or himself in the wrong. It is true that he was as destructive as he was constructive, and that his way of getting out of a difficulty was generally by creating a bigger one, for he liked to keep, as he said, 'things moving.' But annoying as he often was, Joe already knew by experience that he could be a friend in need, and on the day after that wasted afternoon there was ample excuse for grumbling if Ormsby had cared to indulge in that deplorably depressing pursuit. For Joe was chosen to play scrum-half for the house fifteen.

Most of the first fifteen were either playing on Big Side or injured in one way or another, and when Joe saw his name on the board, and had to listen to Cole's sarcastic congratulations, he was too disgusted to say a word.

Up to that time Ormsby and he had only played in three or four junior games, and in these the former had shown that he was both quick and clever, while the most complimentary adjective applicable to Joe's efforts was 'sedate.' He had not done anything foolish for the simple reason that he had scarcely touched the ball, while Ormsby in one game had got four tries, and by trying experiments had undoubtedly presented his opponents with two. And these experiments were remembered against him by Rose, who superintended the junior football. Far, however, from being disagreeable about this gigantic piece of favouritism, Ormsby implored Joe to stop Cole's criticisms by playing 'better than he knew how.' Ormsby had already ceased to laugh at Joe for being a Rumbold, but whether he considered this a mis-

fortune which had got to be overcome or an honour which must needs be lived up to, Joe neither knew nor cared.

The Frenshamites, who were supposed to be very jealous of Max's, were the opponents against whom Joe was doomed to struggle, and they certainly fought as if they were suffering from a superfluity of spleen, and wished to get rid of it. Joe felt as if he was a pigmy being tossed to and fro by an army of small giants, but before the game was over he was an exceedingly indignant and furious pigmy.

When he returned from afternoon school with Ormsby on that same day he heard Rose saying to Palmer, 'Young Rumbold fought like a young tiger-cat,' a performance which seemed to be meritorious. To hear this surprised Joe, but when he passed into the study-passage and saw Bingo talking to Armitage he guessed the reason why Rose had raised his voice while he was speaking.

Bingo nodded in a Bingoish way, and Joe hurried on to his room with a blush, which would have made a scarlet peony look pale, covering his face and (he thought) his body.

'Who was that terrific blood?' Ormsby asked as he put down his books with unnecessary violence.

At the moment it seemed impossible that anyone could see Bingo in the flesh and not recognize him. Of all bloods he was *the* blood. Perhaps he rather overplayed the part, for he proclaimed, as loudly as any town-crier could have proclaimed for him, that he was wearing absolutely the most modish clothes.

'Didn't that blood nod to you?' Ormsby persisted.

'He's my brother—Bingo,' Joe replied, and strove hard to say it as indifferently as possible. But the attempt failed. Had he been confessing that Arkwright's Rumbold had suddenly broken out of prison

and appeared in all the glories of a Newmarket coat, his tone could not have been more melancholy.

‘I wonder what *he* wants?’ Ormsby returned, with a lack of interest magnificent in its way; and to show how unimportant Bingo’s arrival was, he produced the canary and began to wind it up. But before that process was completed the bird had taken flight into Max’s garden, where it lay on the grass, and uttered the most excruciating lamentations.

‘You have fairly put the lid on it this time,’ Ormsby said with a chuckle. ‘I can see Max poking his head out of his study window, and looking a bit worried because he’s got a new bird in his garden. I wonder how soon he will be over here.’

Joe did not wonder in the least, for Bingo was occupying the whole of his thoughts. But before five minutes Max and Bingo met outside his room, and he had reason to be thankful for his brother’s sudden arrival.

The way in which Max greeted Bingo was affectionate, and Ormsby and Joe, who were on the right side of the door, could not help hearing what was said. In a minute they knew that Bingo had got leave to come down from Cambridge to play for a scratch team of O. G.’s against the school, that he was staying at the Royal, and that he must dine with Max on the following evening.

‘You’ll have to go,’ Ormsby whispered, but Joe shook his head violently. Indeed, Joe was too much interested in the meeting outside their door to take any notice of Ormsby. For there stood the Max who, Bingo had said, was a good sort if you got the right side of him, a Max bubbling with heartiness and offers of hospitality. A very different man from the one who had falsely accused Joe of smoking, and still possessed a greatly desired pocket-book.

‘I’ll bet Max has got the old canary-bird in his hand. It’s coming home to roost,’ Ormsby declared, and prevented Joe from hearing any more of the conversation between Max and Bingo. ‘Now we are in for it; I’ve got hold of him at last,’ Ormsby continued, as the handle of the door rattled.

To Joe it seemed more probable that Max would ‘get hold’ of Ormsby, but before he could express his opinion of the situation, the door opened and Max and Bingo appeared. The former was laughing, while Bingo’s face was wearing a sort of polite smile. If there was a joke, it was evidently one which Max appreciated more than Bingo, which is as much as to say that it was Max’s joke.

Joe had not inherited the perfect ease of manner which was a characteristic of his celebrated brothers, and on this occasion he merely welcomed his visitors by standing up and looking uncomfortable. Ormsby also stood up, but he tried with some success to look as if he was surprised by this intrusion upon his privacy, and would be glad to have it explained.

‘You don’t seem in any hurry to speak to me,’ Bingo said, and held out a hand which Joe grabbed.

‘Musical geniuses are often, I am told, absent-minded,’ Max remarked; and Joe introduced his brother to Ormsby.

For a moment conversation came to a complete standstill, and then Ormsby broke the silence by asking Max to sit down.

However embarrassed Joe may have been, it was evident that Ormsby intended to play the host in his own room, and—as he explained afterwards—the fact that Max rather abruptly declined his offer of a chair was no proof that the offer ought not to have been made.

‘I looked in to ask one or two questions,’ Max

said. 'Both of you boys are, I imagine, devoted to music?'

In reply Ormsby merely grinned, so Joe vouchsafed the information that he was fond of some kinds of music.

'What kinds, for instance?' Max asked.

'The fiddle, for one, sir.'

'Sometimes he makes the most hideous noise at home,' Bingo remarked.

'Perhaps you are fond of hideous noises?' Max said to Joe.

'I soon get tired of them,' Joe replied; and at this answer Max was pleased to smile. But it was a smile with two sides to it, one for the benefit of Bingo, the other for the bewilderment of Joe.

'How about this?' he asked, and, as had been prophesied, the canary had come 'home to roost.'

'That bird, sir, is mine,' Ormsby declared at once.

'And are you so musical that you threw it into my garden?' Max continued, and his smile became twisted.

'I rather like it; I know it's a peculiar taste,' Ormsby continued.

'That isn't an answer to my question.'

Ormsby looked as if he was trying to remember the question, and then answered: 'I bought the bird; it wanted oiling when I got it first.'

'Who threw it into my garden?' Max inquired, and his smile had completely subsided.

'I did, sir,' Joe said.

'But he only did it because he was furious with the bird,' Ormsby hastened to explain. 'I mean that he didn't throw it into your garden because it was your garden, but because he had got to throw it somewhere, and the window happened to be handy.'

'How do you know that?' Max asked, and he

seemed to be mildly amused by this copious explanation.

'Because, sir, I was here when the bird departed. It was all my fault for buying the thing.'

'Probably,' Max said, as if the matter had lost all interest for him.

That what had promised to be quite a good row should come to such a dismal end was most disappointing to Ormsby, and he was puzzling out a way to revive it, when Bingo exclaimed:

'Isn't that William's awful picture? How on earth did it turn up again?'

'That is another of the exploits of this redoubtable couple. Their tastes both in music and painting are deplorable. In fact, they want educating all round,' Max informed Bingo.

Whereupon Bingo inspected the picture, while Max glanced at some books which Joe had brought from home.

The cessation of hostilities seemed to Joe to be only a prelude to more troubles, but it gave Ormsby an opportunity to think of what he claimed some years afterwards to have been a happy idea. At the time its happiness can scarcely be said to have been very apparent.

'Didn't you sell that picture to an old Jew?' he asked Bingo.

At this question Max looked up quickly, and seemed to be much more interested by it than by Joe's books.

'I don't know,' Bingo replied very doubtfully, and with his nose extraordinarily close to the work of art. At the best of times Joe considered that this brother of his was a little too clever at avoiding blame, but he thought that caution was now being carried to excess.

'But you did sell the picture; I remember you saying so,' Joe remarked.

'I sold a picture,' Bingo replied, 'and it was very much like this. But this seems a lot more hideous than the other, if there is another.'

With this answer Joe was content, for at any rate Bingo's doubt had not arisen from fear of offending Max.

'I am hearing a good deal too much to-night; there can't be two such daubs in existence,' Max said; and then, turning on Joe and Ormsby, he added: 'I advise you two to behave yourselves for the future. You are forgiven now, and we'll start fresh. But you have to remember that my garden is not a refuse-heap for your rubbish.'

The last sentence was addressed solely to Joe, and then Max touched Bingo on the shoulder and told him to come and see Mrs. Lomax. The door had, however, scarcely closed, when he opened it again and said to Joe: 'I shall expect you to dine with us to-morrow night at seven-thirty.'

He disappeared again before Joe could reply, and Ormsby gave a long and plaintive whistle.

'I suppose I shall have to go,' Joe said.

'You'll get some topping food. He might have asked me as well,' Ormsby returned.

'He's only asked me because Bingo is here.'

'Still, it's rude of him to leave me out; I can't get going with him anyhow; he forgives me at sight,' Ormsby replied; but when pressed, he admitted that an invitation to dine with Max was not altogether a source of unmixed joy. 'It's a bit of luck,' he added, 'that we didn't take that picture back, for Max has forgotten he ever told us to.'

Bingo stayed at Granby for two or three days, and during that time Joe obtained a very clear vision

of his importance. Against the school fifteen he played well enough (so Joe was told by Rose) to show that he could have played much better if he had wished.

Possibly Joe would have enjoyed Bingo's performance had he been able to catch more than fleeting glances of the game, and had not the thought of dining with Max seriously depressed his spirits. Standing, however, behind the touchline, he could see hardly anything of the players; but he could quite easily imagine Max, Mrs. Max, Bingo, and himself sitting round a table, with his host's eyes riveted upon him.

'I shall not be able to eat or speak, and if I try to drink I shall splutter. I am simply bound to upset something that stains the tablecloth; I always do,' he said suddenly to Ormsby, who was craning his neck in a vain attempt to see something of the game.

'Don't you waste a chance of a good meal; and if you see your pocket-book, drop on to it like a knife. It's yours,' was the reply.

'It isn't likely to be floating about in the soup,' Joe remarked.

'You never know your luck. It belongs to you all right, if you can only pouch it. What I should like to know is why fellows who want to see a game are made to stand on the bottom side of the ground where they can't see anything, while a lot of people who wish footer had never been invented stand on the top side and wonder how soon they can go home?'

'You might say all that again,' Joe told him.

'Not worth it,' he said truthfully; 'but it amounts to this, that I am fed up with trying to look through fellows twice as thick as I am, or over fellows twice as tall.'

'The funny part is that we should be called "slopers" if we weren't here,' Joe said.

'I shall buy a pair of stilts and bring them up to

the next match. That will draw attention to our grievances.'

'It will draw heaps of attention to you,' Joe told him.

'I am a nailer on stilts,' he replied, 'and, anyway, you have got to sacrifice yourself for the public good. My father is always rubbing that into me.'

'I'm about fed up with sacrificing myself,' Joe assured him.

'That's right enough,' he replied at once, 'because if you liked sacrificing yourself, it wouldn't be a sacrifice—at least, I don't think it would. This blooming game is over, and I should say we have won, for Max is patting Palmer on the back. It's a compensation for a very dull afternoon to remember that when we have lived a few more years, we may be worthy to be patted on the back by Max. Don't you think so?'

Joe thought that his companion was talking even more 'absolute tosh' than usual, and promptly told him so.

'I like your sturdy way of speaking the truth,' he replied, and proceeded to say how he should behave if Max had asked him to dinner.

He tried to persuade Joe that Max ceased to be a master as soon as he became a host, and that therefore he ought to be given a chance, and to be treated like an ordinary human being. Most of what he said was compounded of madness and mischief, but he finished up as they went into their room: 'If I were you, Joe, I'd bury the old Max, and begin all over again with him. He's a sort of Janus, and you have got hold of his wrong face. It makes me ill to see you funking Max, when really you are no more of a funk than Garibaldi.'

'He's a biscuit,' Joe said without thinking.

‘He’s also the bravest man who ever lived; you may put the last button of your best coat on that. Men with bulging foreheads come down to see my father, and the only man they ever agree about is Garibaldi. A dinner with Max would be a picnic compared with some of the meals I have been through at home; they last for hours, and I’m not allowed to bolt.’

At this Joe expressed his sympathy, and also begged Ormsby to come and spend some of his next holidays at Maiden Croft. But before the invitation could be either refused or accepted, Steel appeared.

‘I was to give Mrs. Lomax’s compliments, and she would be glad if Mr. Ormsby would dine with her and Mr. Lomax at seven-thirty,’ he announced.

‘You’re rotting,’ Ormsby said; but no one ever looked more incapable of rotting than Max’s butler.

‘That was the message I was to give,’ he said, and retreated without waiting for a reply.

Ormsby, however, pursued him into the passage, and shouted to him.

‘Wait a minute; I must send an answer,’ he called out.

‘An answer is unnecessary. Mrs. Lomax’s invitations are treated as commands,’ the butler returned.

‘That just serves me right for rotting you,’ Ormsby said to Joe; ‘but all the same, we’ve got to get some fun out of this somehow.’

He spoke a little aggressively, for, with reason, he thought that Joe would have something to say about this sudden and unexpected invitation. But Joe frequently wasted opportunities, and on this occasion he was so wholly delighted to think that he would have Ormsby’s support, that he did not attempt to be funny at his expense.

Until Ormsby had spoken so straightforwardly,

it had never occurred to Joe that he could be accused of funking Max ; but although for the future he determined that this charge should not be true, he went to the dinner-party with no hope whatever of enjoying himself. No sooner, however, had he and Ormsby placed tentative feet inside the drawing-room, than they found that there were several other guests besides themselves.

Bingo, with the latest fashion in buttons upon his white waistcoat, was standing by the fireplace, and Joe saw Palmer and Armitage looming tall in the distance, while some of the O.G.'s who had been playing against the school were scattered round the room.

The advance of these two small boys upon the coat-tailed crowd was not exactly a pleasure-trip, but before they could decide whether the last state of this party was better or worse than the one they had expected, Mrs. Max descended upon them.

Somehow or other Joe had forgotten that, under any circumstances, he would have one friend at the dinner-party ; for the most uncomprehending boy ever born had only to be at Max's house for a few days to find out that Mrs. Max was the champion of everyone who was weak, or insignificant, or in trouble.

In Max's, athletic to its finger and toe tips, she was invaluable. Boys might be furious with Max, and criticize him as bitterly as they liked, but Mrs. Max was out of bounds for that kind of conversation. She was as sacred to the Maxites as the regimental pet to the most inhuman soldier. How she arrived at this state of distinction Joe never knew, for she was there when he went to Granby, and was just accepted as a gift from the gods, a treasure beyond either praise or blame.

On this occasion she took Joe and Ormsby in hand at once, and begged the latter's pardon for not asking

him sooner. And when she saw that this had reduced Ormsby to a state of confusion, she added: 'The truth is that I expected my young nephew, who is in Mr. Ferguson's house, but he is in bed with a bad cold; so I asked you to prevent Joe from feeling lonely.'

The gong, however, sounded before Ormsby could reply, and Max rushed round his guests as if he was a sheep-dog, and practically drove them into the dining-room.

'You sit on my right, and you on my left,' Mrs. Max, quite unruffled by these gymnastics, said to Joe and Ormsby; and the former's spirits gave such an upward jump that he felt like shouting.

For this announcement was in its way a message of salvation, and when Joe was seated by Mrs. Max, with Ormsby opposite to him, and the O.G. who had insisted upon being stumped at Maiden Croft on his right, he thought that he had been hopelessly idiotic to worry about this dinner-party.

A long way off, at the other end of the table, Max sat with Bingo and other bloods to keep him company, and Joe thanked his stars that his O.G.—whose name was Watney—was inclined to be stout, and afforded a splendid protection from critical eyes.

As the dinner went on Joe had a delicious feeling that at Mrs. Max's end of the table the conversation was almost treasonable. At the very start Watney had won Joe's and Ormsby's admiration, because they discovered from some remark of Mrs. Max's that he had been on an expedition to the North Pole. In fact, he seemed to have been all over the world, searching for things which were too successfully hidden; but whether he had been wasting his time or had not, he was, at any rate, a new experience to Joe, and his views about games and their importance were

so violently opposed to Max's, that Mrs. Max had at last to tell him that he was a most amusing and amiable crank.

Possibly he was not pleased with being called 'amiable,' for shortly after Mrs. Max had labelled him he dropped a regular bomb into the room.

'I would rather,' he said during a pause in the conversation, 'swim the Channel than beat the Australians by a single innings off my own bat.'

After this announcement Joe glanced at Ormsby to see whether he was disappointed. For, after looking for a Pole, Joe could not understand anyone wanting to do a sort of second-rate thing like swimming the Channel. But it soon transpired that Watney had only made this announcement to provoke a discussion, and in this he was certainly successful.

Joe heard Mrs. Max say quietly that it was far too bad of him, and he turned to her and replied: 'I am very sorry, Mrs. Max, but I had to have a whack at them. They will really enjoy it.'

If, however, outward and visible signs count for anything, it did not seem as if Max and the bloods sitting near him enjoyed this bomb as much as Watney enjoyed throwing it at them. In a minute they were all in full cry after him, and until they had talked themselves more or less to a tongue-still he just sat and smiled at them.

Channel swimming was ridiculed as a yearly advertisement for patent foods, and as a pretext for getting photographed for the halfpenny papers. And the bomb-thrower laughed out loud when an O.G., whose collar concealed the lower portion of his countenance, expressed a pious hope that no Granbeian would ever disgrace the school by swimming in the presence of reporters.

'You play cricket and all your little games before

reporters. Why shouldn't you swim in front of them?' Watney asked.

'It isn't *done*,' the collared one said emphatically.

'If you can't see the difference for yourself, we shall never make you,' Bingo told him.

'“Little games”!’ Palmer exclaimed so scornfully that Mrs. Max smiled. To have exasperated Palmer was a feat in itself.

'You forget,' Max said, 'that what you scoff at as “little games” are part of a thought-out and regulated system for the forming and training of character.'

'Of course they are,' came in chorus.

'The expression “play the game” means a lot to Englishmen,' the O.G. next to Ormsby remarked; and as this man had been monosyllabic until that moment, Joe felt sorry that his first effort to contribute to the conversation was totally disregarded.

'What sort of character is your system forming?' Watney asked Max.

In reply the latter hit straight from the shoulder. He gave instances of public men who derided sport and athletics and who lost their tempers when they were heckled in debate. He advanced the view that the British Empire was to all intents and purposes held together by the visits of cricket and football teams to various Colonies. Max, indeed, was more than a little angry, and if he exaggerated the advantages of games, it must be acknowledged that he spoke very fluently and forcibly.

'Games of all kinds,' he concluded, 'are a discipline which is not to be scoffed at because it happens in most cases to be pleasant. You pessimists think that everything must be disagreeable before it can possibly be right. If a man is a good enough cricketer to play for England, you say at once that he ought to be ashamed of himself for wasting so much time;

but you would be the first to say that the country is going to the dogs if England happened to be beaten at any game under the sun.'

A buzz of approval was Max's reward, but his opponent looked supremely calm and good-tempered.

'You are wrong,' he replied, 'in thinking that I am a pessimist either about the country or about public schools. All I want are some alterations.'

'For instance?' Max snapped.

'I should like to know,' Watney replied, 'that all the boys here and at every other public school are taught to ride, shoot, and swim. No time? I agree, under your present system. But why should it be thought necessary for a boy either to hit or kick a ball every day of his life except Sundays? Why can't he be taught not only to shoot and ride, but to consider that a good horseman or a good shot is worth as much consideration in his school as the best batsman or the best bowler?'

Max showed obvious signs of impatience before Watney had finished speaking. Here, he thought, was the pernicious amateur who was the bane of every public schoolmaster's life. The kind of man who loved to display his ignorance by writing to the daily papers. No other profession on the face of the globe was liable to such outrageous attacks. Such thoughts went rapidly through Max's mind as he listened to what he considered Watney's impossible suggestions, and it stands to his credit that he remembered while he was replying that he was speaking to his guest.

'Every boy learns to swim,' he said, 'and most of them learn to shoot. We can't be expected to keep a stud of horses.'

'Why not?'

'The idea is ridiculous, Watney; you know as well as I do how ridiculous it is,' he replied, and turned to

those sitting near him for the support which they were eager to give.

But if Watney in the beginning had begun the discussion from a love of mischief and an inopportune desire to disturb the self-complacency of Max and of the bloods who surrounded him, the subject was one in which he was really so interested that he could not prevent himself from being serious about it. The clamour of Max's adherents annoyed him not at all, but it did add to his determination to continue the discussion, in spite of the fact that he knew Mrs. Max would be annoyed.

'Excuse me, sir,' he said, 'but I don't agree that it is ridiculous. Why shouldn't a certain number of horses be kept, and the boys made to groom, feed, and ride them in turns? Why shouldn't they be taught something which will be useful to them all their lives, instead of a proficiency at ball games, which is no use whatever to them after they are middle-aged? Besides the usefulness of it, you would be giving a different kind of boy a fair chance to become of some importance in the school. Now the athlete is everything, and the scholar nothing, unless he also happens to be an athlete.'

At this point Mrs. Max moved her chair slightly, and thought that it was time to retire with Joe and Ormsby. But when she glanced at Joe's face, and saw it aglow with expectation and excitement, she had not the heart to take him away. If Max wanted them to go, she knew that he would have no scruples in telling her, and strongly as she believed in Granby, she was not one of those who desired to fly directly it was attacked.

Joe could see that Max's eyebrows were beginning to twitch, and, indeed, was so hugely enjoying himself that he had entirely forgotten where he was,

or how he had happened to get there. If he had said anything, he would have merely advised both sides to 'stick to it.' He was a partisan of neither side as yet, but he had a secret admiration for any man who dared to dispute with his housemaster.

'Now,' Max said, and his calmness surprised Mrs. Max, 'you are talking sheer nonsense. In the first place, why should a scholar be more likely to be a good horseman than a boy who can already play games? And, secondly, you take it for granted that what you call "ball games" are no use to a man of middle age. There you are so hopelessly wrong that it is futile to try and convince you. The exercise that a boy has taken during the early years of his life, and the control he has had to keep over his temper, are two of the main factors in giving him a sound constitution and a sound character.'

'I agree with that,' Watney replied at once, 'to a very large extent. I don't want games to be abolished, but I do not want boys to be surfeited with them, and to be made to think that they are a thousand times more important than they are. And as for the scholar, I did not say that he would naturally be a fine horseman; but I do think that to give him another chance of taking his proper position in the school would be a very sound move.'

'His proper position in the school is at the top of his class,' Max said, with a sudden lack of restraint; and Bingo's laughter sounded down the table.

Before the mirth caused by Max's statement had subsided, Watney had time to realize that his argument in favour of riding was one that might easily be ridiculed by an opponent with a sense of humour. He had, he admitted to himself, started on the wrong tack when he had advocated riding for the reason that it might help the scholar. He ought to have

taken a wider view, and to have said that the country needed good shots and good riders more than it wanted men who could drop goals or hit boundaries. So far he had been exploiting his own ideas, and he was perfectly ready to acknowledge that soundness was not the quality for which they were usually distinguished.

But in addition to his own opinions, he held those of a man in whom he believed with the whole of his extremely abundant heart.

'Let us leave athletics,' he said, and smiled imperturbably in the direction of Max, 'and see what public schools are doing in other ways. What, for instance, are you doing to fight the tendencies of the present day?'

'I don't know what you mean,' Max replied. 'Are you going to give a lecture on what the faddists call "social service"?''

Bingo groaned loudly.

'You may call it what you like, but you know far better than I do that in many cases home traditions have utterly disappeared, and that, unless you can provide a substitute, hundreds of boys will leave their schools with no intention of serving anyone except themselves. You have got to fight against national slackness and a decay of ideals.'

'We do fight against them—believe me, we do,' Max answered. 'You are trying to put the blame for lack of national energy, and for every other complaint from which the country is supposed to be suffering, upon the public schools. That, to my mind, is both unfair of you and—if I may say so—disloyal.'

'I wish you would read an article on "Public Schools" in this month's *White Review*. It puts the case a thousand times better than I can put it,' Watney said.

'Who wrote it? One of those meddlesome fellows who can never leave well alone, I'll be bound,' Max retorted.

'It was written by Bingo's cousin, William Rumbold,' Watney answered; and Max leant back in his chair and laughed again and again.

'My dear Watney,' he said at last, 'for a few minutes I admit that you seemed to me to have become slightly demented. I couldn't make out what was the matter with you, and really I thought you were serious. But now I see the whole thing. What a wag you are, Watney! But you always were. Pass Watney the port, Palmer; he has succeeded in giving my leg a very sound pull. William Rumbold!' and again Max had to struggle with his laughter.

But just as Joe was in a bubble of excitement over this abrupt introduction of the family scapegoat into the discussion, and hoping that someone would be found to defend him, Mrs. Max said:

'Will you and Ormsby come to the drawing-room with me?'

Joe knew that it was useless for him to say how eagerly he wanted to stay where he was, but as he passed Bingo, who had opened the door, he whispered:

'Stick up for William; he gave me a sovereign.'

'I'm blowed if I do! If possible, he's a bigger ass than Watney,' was the answer.

CHAPTER IX

AFTER THE PARTY

WHEN Mrs. Max had small boys to entertain, she usually either gave them photographs to look at or puzzles to solve. She provided this form of amusement not for the purpose of silencing her guests, but with the object of giving them an excuse for not talking if they wished to remain dumb. But her knowledge of human nature was deep-rooted, and as she entered her drawing-room she felt that if photographs and puzzles had to be produced on this evening, their appearance would not be due to the shyness of her guests, but because she might be asked questions that were extremely difficult to answer. She had seen both Joe and Ormsby absorbing the conversation that had taken place in the dining-room, and her conscience was a trifle uneasy at having given them such an ample opportunity to listen.

Joe, however, was so afflicted by having been compelled to leave Mr. Watney as the sole champion of William Rumbold, that he was temporarily incapable of thinking of anything except what he would have said if he had still been in the proper place, and had possessed the courage, to say it. He could hear Max's laughter at the mention of William Rumbold's name still ringing in his ears, and he felt as if he was a traitor to have left the room without proclaiming

the fact that, although he had once thought his cousin 'an absolute rotter,' several things (not forgetting the sovereign) had lately happened to make him change his mind.

If Joe was thinking hard an acute expression of anguish always overspread his naturally cheerful countenance, and when Mrs. Max glanced at him she only just checked herself from asking him if he was unwell. Her attention, however, was at that moment diverted from Joe to Ormsby, who had scarcely spoken a word during dinner, and was sublimely ready to make up for lost time. Secretly, Ormsby had determined at this dinner-party to convince Joe that there was no necessity whatever to be afraid of Max. Joe was to have seen him treating his house-master as man to man, and conversing with him on terms of the most invigorating equality. One of Ormsby's extremely pet theories was that there was nobody on earth who had the smallest right to make anyone else nervous, and he held it with all the more tenacity because nine people out of ten who came to stay with his father reduced him to a state of almost frantic terror. He had, however, been through what he called 'the mill,' by which he meant a dinner-table, where he sat for hours listening to arguments which did not interest him.

Max's dinner-party was to have been very different from any that he had been coerced to attend at home. At whatever personal inconvenience to himself, he had resolved to give Joe a lesson. And the reality was such a disappointment that he felt Joe and he must very soon manage to dine with Max again. Look at it as he would—and he could seldom be accused of not facing a situation—he had been a cipher at this dinner. Max had only spoken to him once and then had not waited for a reply, and in

general conversation it was his miserable fate to know that Joe had made five remarks to his three (two of which had been so directly addressed to his plate that they had passed without notice). Indeed, he was—in fairness to Joe—not at all sure that his own score ought not to be entered as ‘one.’

There was more than a dim feeling in Ormsby’s mind that up to now he had done very badly, and the fact that there had been no opportunity to do anything else failed to console him, because lack of opportunity was not accepted as an excuse either by his father or the learned men who visited him. In some way or other he had to set himself right both in his own eyes and Joe’s, and as soon as he was firmly situated in the drawing-room, he determined to ask Mrs. Max a few searching questions.

‘Could you tell me,’ he began, ‘if Mr. Lomax was really amused by Joe’s cousin?’

‘I am afraid I can’t,’ Mrs. Max replied, and added: ‘Why do you think he wasn’t?’

‘Because I have often heard people laugh like that when they are really angry. We argue all meal-times at home, and after an hour or two someone gets scored off, and laughs to show that he doesn’t mind.’

Mrs. Max looked round to see if the puzzles were safely on their table, and wondered if Ormsby would be content to occupy himself with them. If he was not, she resolved to send both him and Joe promptly to bed. Her momentary inattention, however, had given Ormsby the time to see that this last remark might possibly be misunderstood.

‘I did not mean,’ he went on to explain, ‘that I think Mr. Watney scored off Mr. Lomax. I was all for our side.’

‘Which is our side?’ Joe suddenly asked.
‘Why, the Granby side. What’s the use of being

at a place and not believing in it? It isn't any use, is it?' he appealed to Mrs. Max.

'I don't think that either of you need bother about Mr. Watney, for you can trust those who look after Granby to see that it moves with the times,' Mrs. Max replied.

This remark, however, involved her in a veritable flood of questions. Joe wanted to find out whether she knew William Rumbold; and when she admitted that she did, he begged her to tell him what she thought of him. Her evasive answer that both he and she were interested in gardening, and had a lot to talk about, did nothing to turn Joe's attention from what he wished to discover. He did not know the difference between a pansy and a periwinkle, and did not want to, but he desired most intensely to find out whether Mrs. Max held the ordinary Rumbold opinion of Cousin William. But hard-pressed though she was, she managed eventually to turn the conversation away from William Rumbold without having expressed any definite opinion about him, for she recognized that Joe was already more than half inclined to place him upon a pedestal, and knew that nothing except trouble both at Maiden Croft and at Granby could come from that. But the idea of a Rumbold, who was prepared to think more of the despised and unpopular William than of his celebrated and idolized brothers, both aroused her keenest interest and tickled her sense of humour. Here, at any rate, was a secret that she must leave her husband to find out for himself, and for Joe's sake she hoped that the discovery would be long delayed. A Rumbold untrue to sample was not, she knew, likely to be received with any enthusiasm by the ruler of Oakshotte. At the best of times Mr. Lomax had not much patience with boys who showed

a trace of originality ; he liked them to come to him eager and ready to be stamped with the Oakshotte brand. What he called ' animal spirits ' he could and did pardon time after time ; they were merely exhibitions of the physical fitness that he adored, but if a boy got bitten by ' ideas ' Max conceived it his duty to crush them out at once and for ever.

What his feelings would be when he discovered that Joe of all boys was not prepared to be stamped with the Oakshotte brand Mrs. Max could not imagine. During the last holidays he had congratulated himself several times upon the fact that there was still one Rumbold left, and supposing this last of the famous brotherhood was destined to turn out a most painful thorn in the flesh ! No wonder, Mrs. Max thought, that Mrs. Rumbold, who was generally the least fussy of all mothers, had seemed to be anxious about her youngest son.

While Mrs. Max sat quietly thinking, Joe and Ormsby, regardless of her, were engaged upon an argument. She heard Joe saying that he meant to read the article in the *White Review*, while Ormsby declared that he was not going to read any such rubbish.

' Why not ? ' Joe asked him.

' Because if it's sense it will only make me believe everything's wrong. And as long as we have got to stay here, it's a jolly lot more comfortable to think everything's right.'

As her guests seemed to have settled down to an animated discussion, Mrs. Max did not interrupt them until it threatened to become a little too animated.

' I expected you to cram your brothers down my throat, but I rather draw the line at a rotten cousin,' she heard Ormsby saying, and thought that it was time to draw attention to her presence.

'I have heard from your mother,' she said to Joe, 'and there are some messages to you.'

Then Ormsby got up and walked over to the table, on which there were several books of photographs. And as he stood there with his back to Mrs. Max and Joe he had a sensation of supreme internal discomfort, and began to ask himself a series of questions. 'Was it fair to advise a chap to do a thing, and then not dare to do it yourself?' The answer to that question was an emphatic negative, but the matter was not so easily decided as that. 'Wasn't that advice more of a joke than anything else?' He could not reply to this satisfactorily, for he never thought before he spoke, and in most cases could not tell if he really meant what he said. He just blurted out things. So he passed on to another and larger view of the situation. 'When some chap had got hold of a thing that belonged to another chap, and you had a chance to give it back to the right chap, weren't you bound in decency to do it?' It did not matter two brass buttons, he told himself, who the chaps were.

For several seconds his eyes were glued to one spot on the table, and then the thought passed through his mind that he was a funk, and his decision was made. Whatever else he was prepared to be called, he did not intend either to call himself or to be called a 'funk.' Anxious now to get out of the room at once, he turned round and was relieved to find that Mrs. Max was saying 'Good-night' to Joe. In another minute his boats would be completely burnt, a process which had not lost any of its fascination from the frequency with which he had performed it.

But Mrs. Max was in no hurry to dismiss him, and during those minutes Ormsby was conscious of a haunting dread that she knew what he had done, and was giving him a chance to retrieve himself.

Never in his life had he been so hopelessly at a loss for words or so awkward, and in his confusion he found himself biting his nails, a habit which he happened to consider peculiarly disgusting. At last, however, he was allowed to follow Joe, and no sooner was he outside the range of Mrs. Max's eyes than his spirits began to rise.

'Joe!' he shouted, but Joe was already inside the dormitory, and watching Battersby's convulsive efforts to do one more pull-up.

'I want to tell you something quick; I've got no end of a wheeze on,' he whispered in Joe's ear, but at that moment Piper accused them both of thinking themselves bloods because they had dined with Max, and Crake came up to inspect their clothes.

The inspector, however, had only succeeded in finding one spot on Ormsby's trousers when the lights were turned out.

Slowly groping his way back to his cubicle, Joe first of all fell over Battersby, who was lying on the floor and lifting his legs over his head, and then bumped into Ormsby, who caught him by the arm.

'I've got something to show you,' Ormsby whispered.

'It's as dark as black pigs; let it wait until morning,' Joe replied, and stumbled into his cubicle.

But when he was nearly undressed he heard someone moving his curtain.

'Are you in bed?' Ormsby whispered.

'No,' Joe replied, 'can't whatever it is wait? I'm half asleep.'

'You'll be awake enough in a minute. Are you brushing your teeth?'

'I'm trying to find my tooth-powder.'

'Use soap; it's just as good.'

'Not Max's soap. It tastes like tallow.'

Ormsby waited patiently until Joe was in bed, and then delivered the great news.

‘I’ve got it,’ he whispered.

‘What?’ Joe asked.

‘Where’s your blooming hand? Here, take it.’

The first portion of Joe that the pocket-book touched was his nose, but in a few seconds he was sitting up in bed with his property in his hand. His first feeling was one of intense delight, but when the sudden joy of recovering his possessions and of having scored off Max had passed away, he felt such a jumble of emotions that he could hardly speak.

‘How did you get it?’ he managed to ask.

‘It was lying on a table with all those photographs, and when you were talking to Mrs. Max I saw it and boned it. I believe it was stuck there on purpose,’ Ormsby added, and tried to laugh.

‘My whiskers!’ was all that Joe could say.

For what seemed to both of them an interminable time they sat in silence, Joe holding the pocket-book, while Ormsby nursed his knees, and a little resentment at the way in which he was being received.

‘It’s jolly good of you,’ Joe whispered at last, ‘but——’

‘Blow the “buts.” The thing’s yours. Max bagged it, I rebagged it; it’s all as plain as a pikestaff.’

‘You’ll get into an almighty row,’ Joe said.

‘I don’t care if I do. I’m not going to funk Max. And anyway it’s yours, and we’ll spend the inside of it to-morrow so that he can’t have *that* back.’

‘To-morrow’s Sunday,’ Joe reminded him.

‘So it is; still we might use a stamp or two. I *had* to bag the thing; I couldn’t leave it lying there when I’d told you to nip on to it if you got half a chance, could I?’

‘No,’ Joe replied, and failed to be as emphatic as

he wished. 'It's most frightfully decent of you,' he added, and felt that Ormsby was very disappointed with him.

'I'm quite ready to get into a row,' Ormsby continued. 'Max oughtn't to have bagged it, and then left it about. Won't he be sick when he misses it?'

'Rather,' Joe said.

'I'd hate to bag a thing in cold blood, but your pocket-book was just waiting for me to take it,' Ormsby said, and went on to give copious explanations and to find excuses for what he had done.

It was not by any means the scene of rejoicing over the return of the wanderer that he had beguiled himself into anticipating. Indeed Joe seemed so unable to rejoice, or even to speak, that he almost wished that he had left the pocket-book on the table, or at any rate had never happened to see it.

But the fat was in the fire now, and it was no use to pretend that it was not. And as for the consequences he honestly did not care one straw. Urgently he wanted to have a 'single' with Max, just to put things on a sound footing, but he had something like a weight on his conscience when he thought of the means he had taken to bring about this encounter.

So he continued to find innumerable excuses for his conduct, and to try to make Joe look upon what he called the bright side of the eighth commandment. But although Joe gave an occasional grunt, which was meant to convey either appreciation or assent, the only coherent thought in his mind was: 'He'll be sacked to a dead certainty.' And the dread of such a punishment for the boy, who was by far his greatest friend at Granby, tied his tongue, and prevented him from showing the least enthusiasm over the return of his pocket-book.

'You've forgotten that Max has still got my canary

to play about with,' Ormsby said, in the hope that he might hear Joe laugh.

'So he has,' Joe replied dully, and Ormsby gave up the struggle.

'We'll write dozens of letters to-morrow. I've got a cousin in Montenegro, and another in Persia; they're worth five pence between them. We'll soon get rid of those stamps,' he said, and went back to his own cubicle.

For a moment Joe sat up in his bed and smiled. To have to search for people to write to, so that the contents of the pocket-book might be dispersed as quickly as possible, was an amusing result of Ormsby's adventure, even if it was not precisely the way in which any sane fellow would prefer to spend his money. But as soon as this sense of amusement had vanished, Joe lay down to decide what must be done.

At any cost Ormsby must be saved. The mere thought of Granby without him made Joe want to kick himself for mentioning that Max had kept his pocket-book. 'I might have known that as soon as he knew he would be mad enough to bag the thing if he got half a chance,' he kept on telling himself. And what punishment except expulsion could there be for a fellow who was asked to dinner, and then calmly took a thing that did not belong to him? Even supposing Max let Ormsby off with a tremendous thrashing he would never trust nor believe him again. 'He'll always think he's a thief, and he's really no more a thief than I am. It's just rotten luck,' Joe confided to himself, and resolved to keep awake for hours.

With this end in view he began to think of relations to whom he could write on the following day, but he had only arrived somewhere between the sixth and seventh when he was as fast asleep as Cole, who was snoring stertorously in the next cubicle.

Ormsby's guardian angel was, however, far from being idle on this night, and presently Joe, who as a rule slept without a break until he was called, gave a groan which ended in a grunt and was wide awake. To prevent the possibility of going to sleep again, he got out of bed and put on his trousers.

It seemed to him that he must have been asleep for hours, but to make sure he struck a match and looked at his watch. The only information, however, that he obtained was that his watch had stopped when he had wound it up. Unlike most watches Joe's disliked being wound up, but he was as little discouraged as he was surprised to see that it had behaved in its usual rebellious way.

'What's the good of knowing the time?' he asked himself, and having put on a coat and socks he picked up the pocket-book and crept into the dormitory.

Once and once only had he been by the way he now intended to go, but by what he considered a miracle he remembered it. Usually he came to his dormitory by stairs leading from the boys' side of the house, but on one occasion—some nights before—Mrs. Max had wanted to speak to him, and afterwards had shown him the way by which Max could enter the dormitories.

'*Quo citius eo melius*,' Joe thought, and found time to wonder why a horrible Latin tag should stick in his brain when he was engaged upon such a peculiarly unpleasant mission.

Slowly he shuffled out of his dormitory, and opened the door of the one opposite. This dormitory was called 'The Eighteen,' and for the steady breathing that was coming from most of the cubicles Joe was more than duly grateful. He knew that he had to go round a corner, turn to the left, and walk straight to the end of the dormitory, where he would find a

door. But in the dark he took the corner too abruptly, and bumped his forehead resoundingly against a cubicle. The pocket-book fell from his hand, and he stood shiveringly expectant that someone would bounce out of the cubicle and ask him what he was doing. All, however, that happened was that one fellow moaned as if he was in pain, and another, talking in his sleep, exclaimed: 'Well played; go like blazes, pass to me, and I'm in for a dead cert.' Even in their sleep some of the Maxites continued their daily occupation of getting tries.

This familiar jargon gave Joe's nerves a much-needed tonic, and he sat down quietly on the floor and groped about for the pocket-book until he had found it. Then he went round the corner on his hands and knees, and began almost to enjoy himself. The next stage in his journey was easy, but he had a dreary moment when he reached the end of the dormitory and realized that the door into Max's part of the house might be locked. That fear, however, was quickly removed, and he found himself standing on the top of the stairs. At the bottom of them a light was burning in the hall, but this he considered rather a piece of good fortune. Someone had evidently forgotten to turn it out, or possibly it was left there on purpose. He remembered that his mother liked to leave a light burning in some part of Maiden Croft, because she thought that burglars would be frightened by it. He could not imagine Max being frightened by ten thousand burglars, but perhaps Mrs. Max. . . .

He was in the hall, and stopped suddenly. If it had not been the middle of the night he would have felt certain that someone was talking in Max's study on the right. Panic again seized him, and without waiting to listen he ran noiselessly along the hall and into the drawing-room on his left. The room

was dimly lighted by the embers of a wood-fire, and Joe, dodging quickly between chairs and sofas, placed the pocket-book on the table from which Ormsby had taken it.

Then without stopping to listen, and indeed without thinking of anything except the extreme necessity of returning to his cubicle at top speed, he ran into the hall and straight into the arms of Bingo, who was being helped into his coat by Max.

'Well, I'm——' Bingo exclaimed, and remembered just in time that Max was behind him.

'I never expected to see you,' Joe stammered after a pause that seemed unending.

'That I can easily believe,' Max remarked, and laid Bingo's coat upon a chair.

Now that Joe was face to face with a crisis he was neither terrified nor even afraid, but he did feel, as he himself expressed it afterwards, 'a most fearful ass.'

'This wants inquiring into,' Max said unnecessarily, and then added: 'Supposing we all go into the drawing-room, I think the clue to the mystery will be found, or possibly *not* found, there.'

'What on earth are you doing?' Bingo asked Joe, but the latter only smiled, and whispered: 'Don't get in a bait; it will be all right.'

Just how it was going to be 'all right' Joe did not quite know, but this campaign, at any rate, was going to begin with a mighty surprise for Max, and that was enough for the moment.

In procession they marched into the drawing-room, Max leading with a lighted candle, then Bingo, and lastly Joe, who had an insane desire to pull his brother's coat-tails.

The meaning of these proceedings was totally unknown to Bingo, but he succeeded in going through them with a solemnity that made Joe want to laugh

aloud. The procession drew up at the table devoted to photographs, and Joe moved forward so that he should not miss the sight of his housemaster's face. Max, however, did not betray any astonishment even if he felt it, for he merely picked up the pocket-book, and asked Bingo if he had seen it before. With an air that would have made many a detective jealous Bingo examined it, and then said: 'I believe Pads used to have a thing like this. It's neither one thing nor the other. It's a sort of cross between a leather case and a pocket-book. I expect he gave it to Joe.'

'He did,' Joe said briefly.

Whereupon Max examined the inside of the heterogeneous article, and then his eyebrows twitched, and he frowned fiercely at Joe.

'Now, perhaps you will explain,' he said.

'I can't,' he replied.

'Did you come here to get this?' Max asked impatiently, and held the pocket-book up before Joe.

'No, I didn't,' was the answer.

'Then why did you come?'

'I came, I came . . . because I wanted to come. I didn't come to do any harm to anybody,' Joe replied, and no longer wished to pull Bingo's coat-tails.

'Do you hear that?' Max asked Bingo, 'What is to be done with such a boy?'

And then Bingo was struck with an idea, for which he subsequently demanded more credit from Joe than he got.

'He walks in his sleep,' he said. 'I expect he just walked here and then woke up. I remember the mater being anxious about it years ago.'

'Do you walk in your sleep?' Max asked Joe.

'Not that I know of.'

'You did once,' Bingo said emphatically, 'I am absolutely certain you did.'

'I'd eaten lobster for supper, and I only fell out of bed. The nurse got into a row,' Joe remarked.

'Do you think you were walking in your sleep to-night?' Max asked him.

'No,' Joe replied.

'It's your good dinner, sir; he ought to be tied up in bed,' Bingo hastened to say.

For a minute Max stood by the little table and looked sternly at the culprit; while Bingo, from some protective feeling which was foreign to his nature, poured forth reasons for Joe's sudden appearance.

'I am not satisfied,' Max said at last, 'very far from being satisfied, but you had better go back to your dormitory.'

'Thank you, sir,' Joe replied, and turned towards the door.

But he had hardly started on his return journey when Max called him back.

'Whatever is the real reason why you came here, I disbelieved you once about this thing, and I won't again. Take it,' he said, and handed the pocket-book to Joe. 'I meant to give it back to you to-night, and forgot all about it,' he added.

'Thank you, sir,' Joe repeated, and a huge smile of gratitude and surprise beamed over his face.

* * * * *

'So far I am very disappointed with your young brother,' Max said when he was again saying good-bye to Bingo.

'He's always been a freak,' Bingo admitted; 'but a year or two here will put him straight.'

'He's very obstinate, and has ideas,' Max went on, and his look of distress was remarked by Bingo.

'Squash them, sir; we can trust you to do that,' he replied, and he meant to be complimentary.

CHAPTER X

BINGOISM

COMPLETELY bewildered by Max's generosity Joe hurried back to bed, and wondered how he should explain to Ormsby that they need no longer dissipate the contents of the pocket-book by writing to stray relations. He could not imagine what he should say to Ormsby, who would—to put it mildly—be very disappointed at being deprived of his 'single' with Max. 'Perhaps the best thing will be to say nothing at all,' Joe decided, and promptly went to sleep.

At Granby, Sunday morning with its extra hour for sleep was welcomed by most of the school. Ormsby, however, could never spend this extra hour in bed, because he had got into the habit of waking up at a fixed time, and directly he was awake he wanted to do something.

No sooner was he awake on this Sunday morning than he went to have a look at Joe, but the latter was sleeping so soundly that he was kind enough not to disturb him. He looked at the pocket-book which was lying on Joe's washstand, grinned largely, and retired into his own cubicle to read. For ten minutes his book engrossed him, and then the thought occurred to him that he would inspect every cubicle in turn, and see what the occupants looked like when they were asleep; but the only thing that engaged

his attention for more than a few seconds was Harper's Adam's apple.

Very soon he was back again in Joe's cubicle, and gazing steadily at the sleeper. At this time he considered himself as unsentimental as a grasshopper, but all the same he had an affection for Joe so different from the ordinary, careless feeling which he had for the rest of his schoolfellows, that it sometimes surprised and even irritated him. Joe, in fact, seemed too good to be true. Instead of bragging continually about what his brothers had done and of what he was going to do, giving himself innumerable airs and disdaining the friendship of the fellow who happened to share his room, Joe refused to take the smallest advantage of his name, was so modest that he seemed to be almost unnatural, and had already shown in frequent little ways that he considered Ormsby his greatest friend in the house.

'It's nearly getting-up time,' he said at last, and sat down plumpingly on the side of the bed.

'It's you again,' Joe mumbled, and rubbed his eyes wearily. Then he sat up, saw the pocket-book, and smiled.

'That's better,' Ormsby told him; 'you were as glum as a sick hen last night.'

'I was thinking that you'd get into an awful row,' Joe replied, and realized at once that this was not the kind of thing he had better say.

'I like rows; at least, I want one with Max. Until you've had a bust-up with a beak, you don't know what he's made of. I thought Ridley was as mild as butter until I stirred him up. I can't stand a mild beak; he's an anachronism.'

'A what?'

'It's another word for a misfit, but it's probably not the right one. It's the sort of word you'll have

poured all over you when you come to stay with me.'

'But it's no use having a row with Max if you can help it, because you know he's not mild. He's a mixture,' Joe added.

'I can't help it now,' Ormsby returned promptly, 'and anyhow I'm keen on mixtures; I want to see how they are made. I'm jolly glad now that I boned your bullion; it will just show Max that I'm not scared of him.'

'I don't suppose he thinks that you are,' Joe said.

'For that matter I don't suppose he thinks about me at all, but this ought to make him. It's rather funny that while I do nothing but jaw about Max, he has probably forgotten that I was ever born.'

'Let's give him a rest,' Joe advised.

'After this is over we'll have a committee meeting, and decide what to do with him and this bullion.'

'I shan't spend it on writing to any relations,' Joe said emphatically.

'I should think not,' Ormsby agreed at once; 'that was a perfectly mad idea. Let's see how much there is in this pocket-book, then if Max bags it again we can send him a bill. That would be a splendid wheeze.'

'Spread it out on the bed,' Joe said.

'Two shillings' worth of penny stamps,' Ormsby began, 'one bob in halfpenny stamps, a twopenny-halfpenny stamp which looks as if it had been out in the rain—still it counts.'

'Three and twopence halfpenny,' Joe recorded.

'A packet of postcards, two foreign postcards, and I'm blessed if there aren't three newspaper-wrappers. It's a regular fit-out.'

'Put that lot at sixpence. How about the postal order?'

Ormsby opened it, and then looked at Joe. 'Guess,' he said.

'Half-a-crown?'

'More.'

'Five bob?'

'More.'

'You're rotting.'

'I'm not.'

'Ten bob?'

'More.'

'Let me look.'

Ormsby passed it to Joe.

'A blooming sovereign,' the latter said. 'Pads is a decent sort.'

'Your relations beat mine into a cocked-hat in the way of tips; all of mine are too afraid of my father to tip me. Not that I mind. If my uncle Gilbert tipped me, I know I should want to hit him; he's a director.'

'What difference does that make? I shall write to Pads to-day, we were absolutely stumped until this came,' Joe said.

'Rather; you'll have to write to him. It makes all the difference,' Ormsby went on. 'He's pompous, he's directed something or other ever since he hopped out of his cradle, he told me that himself. Now he's chairman of about a hundred different companies, and when he comes to stay with us my father always greets him with: "Not in prison yet, Gilbert?" It's the only joke he has ever made, and it simply makes Uncle Gilbert furious.'

'I don't wonder,' Joe remarked, and then the bell rang.

* * * * *

If any new boy at Granby wanted to know who was really a 'school-blood' and who was not, an ample

chance to satisfy his curiosity was offered to him on Sunday mornings. For after chapel the swells of Granby laid aside all house jealousies and quarrels, and arm-in-arm marched across the playing-fields in a long line.

To most squeaklings this was an awesome spectacle, though Ormsby had no sooner gazed upon this imposing sight than he had called it 'The Cart-Horse Parade.' For this exhibition of bloodship he professed a most withering contempt, and one of the first reasons why he took a cordial dislike to Bingo was because the latter had organized it into a formal march. Joe merely accepted it as a display in which he neither expected nor wanted ever to take a part—there was too much of the 'public-eye business' about it for him; but Ormsby could never see it without suggesting that they should walk straight through it, break it up, and be hounded by the whole pack round the playing-fields.

The way in which fellows were selected to take part in this triumphal march was more than a little indefinite. Without certain obvious 'bloods' it would, of course, have been as inglorious a sight as a Derby parade of cab-horses and mules; but how fellows who were little gods in their own houses, though as yet unpedestalled in the school, managed to join 'The Line,' was unknown to the squeaklings.

During the last year Palmer, West, and Armitage had been prominent members of 'The Line,' and when Rose had returned to Granby for this term he had felt certain that he should be asked to join it. Every Sunday he had walked up to chapel with the important trio, had given them broader and broader hints, and had hung about after chapel waiting for the invitation that had not been given.

This lack of public recognition was an enormous

fly in Rose's ointment, and with Bingo's arrival he determined that it should be removed. Bingo attended chapel in a suit of the most 'daring' clothes that had ever found a place in a Granby stall. Of these garments it is enough to say that they were noticed by everyone, and that when Joe caught sight of them during the Psalms, he was so amazed that the First Lesson had reached its second verse before one of the fellows next to him pulled him to his seat. The remainder of the service was entirely useless as far as Joe was concerned. He had made an exhibition of himself, and the almost inaudible titter that he noticed as he sat down seemed to him to increase in volume as he thought of it.

Rose, however, looked at Bingo with undiluted admiration, and as soon as chapel was over he fastened on to him with the tenacity of a leech. If he missed this chance Rose knew that 'The Line' might be deprived of his presence for the rest of this term. He did not dare to take Bingo's arm at once and settle the matter one way or the other, for that glorious limb was by right reserved for those more qualified than he was to grasp it. But, in spite of the buzzing crowd of bloods round Bingo, he kept his place and finally received his reward.

When 'The Line' was at last formed Bingo looked round, and saw Rose standing behind him. 'Tack on at the end,' he said to his parasite, and Rose tacked on as quickly and firmly as he could. Nevertheless it was not the triumph that he had anticipated; the fellow whose arm he had perforce to take was an abrupt Frenshamite, who replied to Rose's mellifluous remarks in monosyllables or not at all. Frequently, indeed, this ungracious fellow got rid of Rose's arm altogether under the pretext that he wanted to blow his nose, and when Rose foolishly asked him

if he had got a cold, he replied: 'No, I blow my nose for fun.'

Unfortunately for Rose, he had tacked on to a fellow who detested the sight of him, and who never in the course of a strenuous life had disguised his feelings.

The satisfaction that Rose gained from his first appearance in 'The Line' was solely derived from the fact that anyone who had once joined could always join it again, and from the glory of walking back to the house with Bingo and a few real bloods.

'Will you come to my room?' Rose asked Bingo, as soon as they were in Max's.

'In a minute; I want to speak to my minor,' Bingo replied, and went straight to Joe's room.

At the moment of his entrance Ormsby was trying to put Bingo's clothes in the best possible light, for Joe was nearly mortified to tears by their splendour. But as soon as Ormsby came 'right up against them,' he gave a kind of choking gurgle, and then fled headlong from the room.

'Is that fellow mad?' Bingo asked, and after he had hitched up his trousers carefully he sat down.

'Not especially,' Joe replied.

'Then why does he make such loathsome noises, and bolt like a rabbit?'

'Your clothes—he's scared by their colour.'

'They're the *latest* colour,' Bingo asserted.

'But they want a bit of getting used to,' Joe added.

Bingo looked at his trousers, and was evidently pleased with them.

'What the blazes were you poking about in Max's part of the house for?' he asked suddenly.

'I thought you'd come to ask that,' Joe replied, but he showed no inclination to answer the question.

'If I hadn't thought of that sleep-walking yarn,

you'd have caught it pretty hot. It's not the sort of thing Max expects one of us to do ; it looked to me as if you were prowling about after that pocket-book.'

'I wasn't,' Joe said very quietly.

'Then what on earth were you doing ?'

'I'm not going to say—it isn't worth talking about.'

'It certainly isn't ; you may bet I'm not going to talk about a brother of mine prowling about like a thief in the night.'

'That's all right then,' Joe said, and he was so relieved to hear that Bingo was not to proclaim this adventure that he looked exasperatingly unashamed.

'I'm blowed if it is all right, though,' Bingo went on. 'How did your pocket-book get into Max's drawing-room ?'

'He bagged it ages ago.'

'And you mean to say that you weren't looking for it ?'

'I was not looking for it,' Joe replied.

'If anyone else told me that I should say it was a lie,' Bingo declared, and Joe was intensely surprised to hear anything so complimentary.

'I'm glad you believe me,' he said sincerely.

'I can't help believing, but I'm blessed if I understand what you're up to. Max and I had a talk after the others had gone last night, and he's pretty sick about you. Don't you begin treading on Max's tail ; it's all your own fault if you put his back up. He seems to think a lot of this Ormsby fellow. What sort of a chap is he ?'

'Does Max think a lot of Ormsby ?' Joe returned, and began to smile.

'A precious lot more than he does of you. He says Ormsby will train into a first-rate athlete ; he's very keen on him.'

At this Joe broke out into a series of chuckles, and the sound of them exhausted Bingo's patience.

'You've got to buck up,' he said impatiently, 'and remember that we shall all be disgraced if you are going to make a silly ass of yourself. Rose tells me he has been trying to push you on, and that you don't seem to like it. Palmer says you seem a decent sort of kid, but he thinks you are rather slack. The only fellow who has a good word to say for you is Armitage.'

'What does he say?'

'Armitage always has been a freak.'

'But what does he say?' Joe asked again.

'He pretends to admire your bloated independence. What he means is that you are idiotic enough to forget that you are a Rumbold, and that everything can be as easy for you here as falling off a house, if only you'll stick your back into it.'

'I'm getting on all right.'

'How?' Bingo asked scornfully.

'Oh, I don't know,' Joe replied. 'I've been top of my class five weeks out of six, and I've been to breakfast with Mr. Ridley.'

'Ridley! He's an old woman; he plays squash-rackets and is about as much use at cricket as a dancing dog. He's not the sort of master you ought to be friends with.'

Joe at last began to be really amused. 'What masters would you advise?' he asked.

'There's Thorpe, he's a double-blue, and as keen as mustard. Billy Musgrave, a top-hole chap; no nonsense about him. Sally Lunn, he's about as good a bowler on a sticky wicket as Blythe or any of them. Sayer, Lee, Ashworth—they can all do something, but Ridley's a rotter. I was "up to him" for a term—and I know.'

Bingo stood up as he finished speaking, and, perhaps luckily, did not notice that Joe was laughing. That a scholar at Granby counted for nothing, Joe already knew; but that the worship of athletics should be passed on to the masters tickled his sense of humour to such an extent, that only with the greatest difficulty could he prevent himself from giving a loud Rumboldish guffaw.

'Well, I've got to go back to Cambridge this afternoon, so I'll say "good-bye,"' Bingo continued, 'and if those miserable Old Whitburians hadn't scratched yesterday and left the 'Varsity without a match, I shouldn't have been here. You may thank your stars that I came. Pull yourself together, and remember what I've said.'

'I shan't forget it,' Joe assured him.

'You ought really to get your first house colours this term,' Bingo said, as he opened the door; 'both Pads and I did.'

'I haven't the ghost of a chance.'

'I'll speak to Palmer about it. Good-bye,' Bingo returned, and left Joe profoundly hoping that Palmer would take no notice of Bingo's interference.

* * * * *

There was, however, at least one definite result from Bingo's visit, for Rose, flushed by his success in joining 'The Line,' gave notice to the squeaklings that the house-singing would take place in their dormitory on the following Saturday night. And this information was received with all the more indignation because most of the new boys had forgotten that such an ordeal was awaiting them.

CHAPTER XI

VOICES

THE fixing of the evening on which he would have to sing prevented Ormsby from wondering incessantly when Max would find out that the pocket-book had disappeared. More than once Joe was on the point of confessing what had really happened, but Ormsby was so delighted to have done this daring deed that it seemed almost a crime to disillusion him. Ormsby, Joe had already discovered, was as eager to give as he was unwilling to receive, and though his gifts were often so eccentric that they caused more pain than pleasure, it was impossible not to recognize his liberality.

Not only was Ormsby ready to share his money (if he had any) with Joe, but if he was in the mood to work he professed to consider it a shame that he alone should profit by his industry. His proses, verses—in fact, all the work he did—were entirely at Joe's disposal, and some weeks passed before he was finally convinced that Joe's views on such matters were incorruptible.

'Everything is run nowadays on a profit-sharing system, or if it isn't it ought to be,' he argued; 'and while you are thinking you're honest, you are only as out of date as a jam-pot with a hole in it.'

'What you want to do is to help me, and not to

be helped yourself. That's a funny way of profit-sharing, or whatever you call it,' Joe declared.

Ormsby thought over this statement for a minute, and then gaily admitted that it was true. 'I suppose that is about it,' he said. 'I'm honest myself, and want to make everyone else a fraud. It seems to me that I'm a fair specimen of a blackguard.'

'I shouldn't worry about that,' Joe told him.

'I shan't,' he answered immediately, 'I shall repent, and wear a hair-shirt next my skin. I shall put in an order for a hair-shirt, and when Max asks me why I want it, I'll say it must be either that or sackcloth.'

As usual, Ormsby had no sooner thought of this way of coming to close quarters with Max than he forgot all about it. The day when 'orders' were allowed to be put in had to be waited for, and by the time it arrived Ormsby found himself face to face with the fact that he had got to sing or—so Temperley told him—be tossed in a blanket.

On the evening after Bingo's departure from Granby, Ormsby sat in his room and pondered over Rose's announcement, and the more he thought of it the more anxious did he become to prepare himself for the approaching ordeal.

'I've been wanting you badly for the last ten minutes,' he said when Joe appeared; 'we'd better have a rehearsal.'

'What of?' Joe asked.

'Do you want to bump your nose against a ceiling? I'm blowed if I do.'

'Bingo ought to be tossed in a blanket,' Joe remarked.

'We'd better stop thinking about him, and think about ourselves for a bit. I'd rather walk the plank than be tossed in a blanket. If we were living in

the bad old times, I'd bribe these singing idiots with pieces of eight or doubloons, or something.'

'I believe you would still be jawing if a man with a game leg was just going to beat out your brains with a pickaxe,' Joe said gloomily.

'I see you are catching the spirit of the thing; you will be as right as rain in a minute. Can you sing?'

'Yes,' Joe replied; and if he had suddenly admitted that he was a snake-charmer, Ormsby could not have been more surprised.

'Not really,' he exclaimed. 'You are a lucky brute.'

'You wouldn't think so if you stayed with us. My brothers don't like any of my noises.'

'But do you play things?'

'I can worry a piano and a fiddle, if that's what you mean,' Joe confessed.

'Then you must coach me. I can't sing in tune to save my life, and my voice gets bunkered in my throat.'

'Never,' Joe interrupted.

'—When I sing,' he continued, 'and it escapes in rasps. We might as well save the Infant Arkwright's life, too. I'll fetch him, there's nothing like making a start at once.'

Joe protested that he was incapable of teaching anything to anybody, but Ormsby refused to listen to these protests and fetched Arkwright.

'We've been getting up steam in the Infant's room, and I've said "Ah, ah, ah" until I nearly burst, and Street asked me to go. The Infant hasn't discovered yet that this is a very serious business,' he said, as he came into the room.

'I don't think I can sing properly, but I've been taught to play the fiddle and the harp, and——' Arkwright began.

'Then you shall join our band which Joe is going to conduct. I advise you to listen to every word he says, unless you want to be tossed in a blanket next Saturday night,' Ormsby interrupted.

Arkwright hastened to assure him that he had no desire to be tossed in anything.

'And you are right enough there,' Ormsby said; 'for as sure as Rose is Rose, you'd bump against the ceiling. When we've got our Musical Society going, we'll start an Anti-Tossing Association.'

Joe left him to talk off his new ideas, and then asked what he really proposed to do.

'You are the boss of this show; you just tell the Infant and me what to do, and we try to do it,' he replied. 'You haven't heard us say "Ah, ah, ah" yet. Supposing we begin like that.'

Forthwith he proceeded to carry out this suggestion, and Arkwright endeavoured to follow his example.

'Now we've both done that, we might get a move on,' he continued, and looked at his instructor.

'What songs do you know?' Joe asked.

'None, absolutely none. I have an open mind, but it is simply gaping for information.'

'Don't you know "John Peel," or "Twickenham Ferry," or anything?'

'I know "J. Peel" just well enough to recognize him when he is, so to speak, in the same room. I should like to know him better,' he added.

Then for five minutes Joe whistled an accompaniment which utterly failed to improve Ormsby's acquaintance with 'John Peel.'

'You are quite hopeless,' Joe had at last to tell him.

'That's what I expected you to say. Now that you know the worst, we can really set about it,' he retorted.

'You've got no more idea of tune than a sheep; it's an impossible job,' Joe said.

'Not a bit of it,' he replied; 'you stand between us and that blooming blanket. We're done to the world unless you stick to it.'

Then they discussed the problem as seriously as Ormsby would permit them, and Arkwright made what seemed to be a very sensible suggestion.

'He can't sing, and I don't believe you will ever make him,' he said; 'but he might be taught to drone a few nursery rhymes.'

'Look here, Diddums, you are talking through your hat,' Ormsby protested at once. 'I'll bet Patti didn't learn to sing in five minutes. Give me a chance before you turn me out to drone.'

'You will have bumped your nose long before you know how to sing,' Joe assured him.

'Don't they dope or do something funny to race-horses, just to get them fit for an hour or two. Couldn't you dope me?' he asked.

Joe shook his head.

'Then let me drone. But what am I to drone?'

'"Old Mother Hubbard" to begin with,' Joe suggested.

After a brief attempt Ormsby announced himself to be a born droner, but his audience disagreed with him. Eventually, however, Joe persuaded him not to say the words as if they were a piece of repetition, and he was then fired with a new idea.

'It would please them better if I didn't drone that old nursery stuff,' he said, 'but made up something fresh. Nothing has ever been done for Mr. Hubbard, who it's any odds wanted that bone. You get on with the Infant Diddums while I worry this thing out.'

In two minutes Joe discovered that Arkwright was infinitely more capable to teach him to sing than he

was to teach Arkwright. Nothing but an outrageous swindle could get Arkwright into the blanket, and having convinced Joe of this, the Infant began to talk about things like counterpoint, which Joe at first confused with cover-point, until Ormsby, deep in the labours of composition, caught hold of him and pushed him summarily from the room.

On the following evenings Ormsby spent most of 'prep' in scratching his head with a pencil, and in crunching up pieces of paper and throwing them round the room. Mr. Hubbard was evidently giving trouble, but Joe refrained from asking any questions about him.

Occasionally Ormsby would stop to say that the Hubbards were silly idiots, who rhymed with nothing except cupboards, and every now and then he declared that he would rather be tossed in a thousand blankets than try to write such mouldy 'tosh.' Nevertheless he continued to try, and on the morning of the ordeal he assured Joe that he had written thirty-seven verses, and his only difficulty was to choose the ones that would be most likely to save his nose from being covered with whitewash.

'I should think a dozen would be enough,' he added.

'Or less,' Joe told him.

'Anyway, there's nothing like having enough. Supposing I was encored?'

In spite, however, of Joe's entreaties, he refused to read specimens of his composition; and when Saturday night arrived Joe was too anxious about himself to worry very much about either Ormsby or Arkwright.

Max was clearly considered to be in favour of the maintenance of these old customs, for when Palmer, West, and Rose (Armitage stolidly refused

to attend) appeared in the Junior Dormitory, they brought several other fellows with them, and none of them behaved as if they were breaking rules.

The audience collected at one end of the dormitory, while the performers were huddled together at the other end, and Joe quickly discovered that the singer of the moment was expected to stand on a washing-stand during his vocal exhibition.

To get a firm stand on one of these washing-stands was a feat in itself, for the maker had not constructed them with a view to their use as concert-platforms.

Regarding the rickety platform with a morbid interest, Joe was rejoicing that he began with an R, and would have the chance to see several balancing exhibitions before he was called upon to perform, when he heard Rose telling him to sing first.

From the beginning Rose had taken charge of the proceedings, and although Ormsby kept on muttering that Palmer ought to be shot for not 'running the show himself,' Joe felt so certain that he was on the point of failing completely that he had no indignation left in him. Obediently he climbed upon the washing-stand, and looked down at the hole into which the basin usually fitted.

Then, after some ironical applause, he began a song from 'The Mikado,' and could only remember half of the first verse. After an interval, he started 'Take a Pair of Sparkling Eyes,' from 'The Gondoliers,' and broke down. Loudly encouraged to 'stick to it' by Rose, he managed to get through the first line of 'I'll sing thee songs of Araby,' and made a statement that immediately turned out to be utterly untrue. His memory for songs of all kinds had completely vanished. As he stood on the washing-stand, he was only conscious of Rose's repulsive face, and of the fact that he would rather be tossed against the

hardest ceiling than remain where he was for another second. Without permission he jumped to the ground, and said: 'I shall have to be stuck in the blanket; I can't remember anything.'

This unorthodox beginning to the proceedings was received with considerable clamour, two or three fellows declaring that Joe ought to have stayed on the platform until he had been told to come down, and that he had better go back again at once. Nothing, however, but the sheerest physical violence could have replaced him on the washing-stand; and in this determination he was supported by Palmer, who said that any fellows who couldn't sing had a right to cut it short and pay the penalty.

'He can sing; he's got a ripping voice. Anyone could tell that,' Rose declared loudly; but this announcement brought forth an unexpected remonstrance from the other end of the dormitory.

'If I can sing,' Joe shouted, 'at any rate I didn't, and no one can say that I did.'

'Shut up. You're asking to be tossed in that rotten blanket,' Ormsby muttered.

'And so I ought to be, if they toss anybody,' Joe returned.

Street was then called upon by Rose, and the washing-stand wobbled ominously under his bulk. As a vocalist Street turned out to be stentorian, and with a gravity rivalling Webster's he bellowed a so-called humorous song about policemen and cooks, which pleased his audience so much that he narrowly escaped an encore.

'I once knew a thing beginning:

' "Our lodger was a nice young man,
A nice young man was he,"'

Ormsby said to Joe, 'and if I had guessed they wanted

that kind of stuff, I would never have been persuaded to drone.'

Arkwright succeeded Street, and, to the delight of everyone except the Master of the Ceremonies, he began to sing 'My love is like a red, red rose.' He was getting on famously, when he slipped and fell through the hole in the washing-stand, and in that uncomfortable position Rose compelled him to finish.

Clive, Piper, Clarkson, and Harper had all prepared themselves, and sang glibly enough; but Cole, who was excused from standing on the platform, began by protesting that he only knew two songs, and that Street had sung one and Harper the other.

'Then sing them both,' Rose told him.

At this command Cole professed to be extremely surprised. 'As soon as they sang them, I forgot them,' he retorted.

'You have *got* to sing something,' Rose said.

'Rumbold didn't,' was the retort.

'At any rate he tried, and he's got the best voice of the lot,' Rose declared.

Then Cole put his hands to his sides, and emitted a prolonged and terrific roar. For nearly a minute he bellowed bullfully, and only stopped when his face was purple.

Even Palmer was aroused by the insolence of this exhibition, but Joe wanted to pat Cole warmly on the back. He did, indeed, try to congratulate the bellower on having scored off Rose, but Cole was in no mood to receive congratulations. He was angry with Rose because of the way in which Joe had been treated, and he failed to understand that Joe himself was also angry, and for a precisely similar reason.

Promptly and unanimously Cole was doomed, and Ormsby's name was called.

'I have,' he said, when he had climbed upon the

platform, 'been recommended not actually to sing, because I have a voice that won't make the noises I want it to. But I'd like to drone, if I may.'

The audience was divided upon this point, Rose and some of his friends wanting to sentence Ormsby forthwith, while Palmer thought that droning might be allowed to pass.

'Can you drone well?' he asked Ormsby.

'Fairly well, I think,' Ormsby replied, and almost fell off the platform in a vain attempt to stop himself from laughing.

'Then drone,' Palmer announced; and Ormsby began:

' "Lean Hubbard (Mr.)
 Couldn't resist her,
 So took to himself a wife;
 But when he was wed,
 Full up was he fed,
 And had a most terrible life." '

'Who wrote this drivell?' Rose asked.

'I am the driveller,' Ormsby replied, and waited for no more comments:

' "For when he grew wiser
 He found that a miser
 Was grudging him even the scraps;
 So he went to the cupboard,
 Did gaunt Mr. Hubbard,
 To grapple that bone—perhaps." '

'That's enough,' said Rose.

'No, let him go on. I rather like it,' Palmer replied.

'Thank you,' Ormsby said, and continued:

' "But when he got there,
 The cupboard was bare,
 For old Mrs. H. had dined.
 And the dog of the rhyme
 Was committing the crime
 Of audibly speaking his mind." '

‘ “ Then Hubbard (the *Mater*)
Boxed the ears of the *Pater*,
And gave the poor hound a kick ;
But no respecter of ladies,
And a donor of rabies,
The dog took a piece of her—quick.” ’

By this time even Palmer was growing restless, so Ormsby jumped straight to his last verse :

‘ “ The end of my story
Is gruesomely gory,
For old Mother H. soon died ;
The dog—he was shot,
And to pile up the lot,
H. soon had a nice, new bride.” ’

Rose immediately expressed a complete contempt for this performance, and announced that Ormsby and Cole would be tossed because they had been the only fellows who had not tried to pass the test.

‘ Ormsby has been trying all this week. It’s a swindle ! ’ Joe proclaimed at the top of his voice ; but in the prevailing hubbub he could not get anyone to listen to him. In turn Cole and Ormsby paid the penalty, and since there was no chance of escape, Ormsby pretended that he was anxious to take an upward trip. But directly he had been released from the blanket, Joe pushed himself to the front, and appealed first to Rose and then to Palmer. He was too eager to be very coherent, but at last he managed to convince Palmer that he wished to be tossed.

‘ You didn’t make much of a job of it, did you ? ’ Palmer said.

‘ I was hopeless,’ Joe replied ; ‘ much worse than Ormsby.’

Then Palmer turned round to speak to Rose, but the Master of the Ceremonies was already leaving the dormitory.

‘It’s too late now; I’ve had enough for one night,’ he said, and followed Rose.

The invasion vanished as quickly as it had arrived, and the squeaklings were left to discuss the events of the evening. That Rose’s judgments were going to be freely criticized Ormsby knew well enough, and he also knew the value of the first word on such occasions.

‘If I had got a voice like you,’ he said loudly to Joe, ‘I should chuck Horace and Ridley, and Max and Virgil, and spend all my time with old Bumble-Toes.’

‘Who is Bumble-Toes?’ Harper asked.

‘Dr. Allender, Mus. Doc., and a few other things. He tried my voice once, and didn’t like it,’ Battersby said, and began to perform on his cubicle bar.

‘What I want to know is why Rumbold wasn’t tossed in that blanket?’ Cole said, and glared at Joe.

‘Then you and I want to know exactly the same thing. I’d like to be tossed now,’ Joe replied.

‘It’s what you deserve, but what you won’t get,’ Cole said.

‘Why not?’ Joe asked.

‘Because Rose would be down on the whole lot of us if we touched your precious skin. You ought to be put in a glass case and wheeled out in a pram,’ Cole told him.

At this reply Piper laughed scornfully, and Joe’s wish to be tossed was suddenly overwhelmed by a desire to stop Cole’s nagging tongue.

‘You know I hate Rose as much as you do,’ he said, ‘and you keep on pretending that I like the brute. As long as you do that, you’re the biggest cad in creation.’

‘You’ve hit the mark bang in the bull’s-eye,’ Ormsby said.

'I'm blowed if I would stand that,' Piper told Cole.

'You're as bad as he is,' Ormsby promptly said to Piper; 'only he's not a funk, and you are.'

'Rumbold knows it's safe to say what he likes, because he's so precious,' Piper sneered. 'Some day I'll get even with him.'

'Then do it now,' Joe retorted. 'I'm ready for either of you.'

'You're a sort of pantomime hero,' Cole told him. 'You know you can't hurt me, and that I should be a fool to punch your head. You wait a bit.'

'I'm not going to wait,' Joe said; but as he advanced to the attack, he was firmly pinioned by Webster.

'We are not going to have any brawling here,' the Serious One declared. 'If you want to make a noise, you can sing. You haven't done it yet.'

'He can't sing for sour apples,' Piper scoffed.

'Can't he!' Arkwright said, and brought a fiddle from his cubicle.

After that the crisis subsided, and Joe was in the middle of his third song when Max unexpectedly appeared, and told him to go on singing until he was told to stop.

In this peculiar way Max punished both Joe and the other squeaklings, for they were compelled to stand up in a row until the end of the performance. But why Max chose to share the punishment, Joe could never understand.

CHAPTER XII

A CHALLENGE

'IF,' Dr. Manning preached on the morning after Joe had sung until he was as weary as his audience, 'I knew how you spend your Sunday afternoons, I should have the key to all your characters.'

Sad to say, the verdict of the School upon the Head's sermons was that they were abnormally long, and it is a fact that throughout his life the Head had suffered (and made others suffer) by not knowing when to stop. In his day he had been a famous three-miler, and now that his youth had passed his long wind still remained, but was used for other purposes than running. Dr. Manning fondly imagined that he was interested in boys, but the truth was that he was interested in the celebrity to be derived from them, and not in the boys themselves. Dull boys, who were not prominent athletes, only came across his line of vision when he punished them.

His ambition, as he had once admitted in an outburst of profound indiscretion, was to keep 'Granby's name blazoning before the public,' and to this Mr. Boyd, who was the Head of the Modern School, and loved Granby with a whole heart, had sarcastically replied: 'Why don't you advertise it in two colours, like a patent food, and put up boards along the rail-

ways with the distance to Granby instead of London upon them ? ’

This had happened at a Masters’ meeting, and, in justice to Mr. Boyd, it must be added that his temper had already been ruffled by the Head’s audible approval, when Max had said that a certain boy was such a fine cricketer that it was a shame to send him into the Army.

‘ To blazon Granby before the public ’ was Dr. Manning’s system, as far as he could be said to have one. Poor Granby, which had been founded by pious John King, a simple man with a zeal for education and a pronounced distaste for advertisement.

As years slipped by under Dr. Manning’s rule, Granby had less and less cause to boast of its intellectual successes, and the list of Honours, which was read out with extreme unction on Founder’s Day, was conspicuous for nothing except the cleverness with which the Head contrived to make the utmost out of the miserable material at his command.

For some years there was a strenuous fight between the masters who put scholarship before athletics and those who seemed to think that the class-room was a troublesome, although necessary, appendage to the playing-fields. Vigorously did both these parties strive to influence Dr. Manning, but by degrees it became quite evident that Mr. Boyd and his supporters were beaten. When a new master had to be appointed, the vacancy was almost invariably filled by some young ‘ Blue,’ whose main interest was in the game at which he had excelled. These young men went to Granby sublimely confident that to teach is the easiest work in the world, and the simplest way of making a living.

By the time Joe became a Granbeian no school in the United Kingdom had such a bountiful crop of

'Blues' as masters, and no school had such a great athletic reputation. For several years boys had been going up to Oxford and Cambridge practically certain to be in the 'Varsity fifteens and elevens, and once (before the advent of the Rhodes' scholars) Granby had no less than seven old boys playing for Oxford against Cambridge at Queens' Club. 'Granby and Trinity,' 'Granby and University,' 'Granby and Exeter,' 'Granby and B.N.C.," and so forth, made a most imposing list in the daily papers, and Dr. Manning chuckled and Max crowed when they read it.

No one resented Mr. Cecil Rhodes's will more than Dr. Manning and Max, for they considered it an actual piece of poaching upon the preserves of Granby. Two forwards of undoubted bulk and recognized ability had gone up to Oxford in successive years, and had failed to get into the 'Varsity fifteen. It was a blow over which Max moaned desperately. 'We won't send our best men to Oxford any more,' he said; 'they will be certainties at Cambridge.'

'Blazoning before the public' Granby certainly was, if by the public Dr. Manning was satisfied with the portion of it that treat athletics as if they are the most important things to talk about and to follow. But during all this time Granby was really living upon its capital. Traditions, the loyalty of Old Granbeians, the fact that the school had in the past done its share of the country's work, composed this capital, but it was already beginning rapidly to vanish.

Ten years before Dr. Manning had expressed his curiosity about the way in which Granbeians spent their Sunday afternoons, a boy whose name had not been entered for a very long time might as well have tried to go to the moon as to Granby. Five years before the waiting-list was still crowded; a house-master's trouble was not how to fill his house, but

how most gracefully to refuse the boys whom he did not want. Two years before Granby was still full, but not overflowing. Now, however, two or three houses were not full, and these vacancies were spoken of with bated breath, as if they were some hideous disease from which the school was suffering, and which would vanish if it was ignored.

When Max had to speak of these vacancies he explained them by censuring old fogies like Boyd, who would not move with the times. Dr. Manning merely remarked that all schools had their ups and downs, and that parents had far too much common sense not to see that Granby turned out the best athletes in the country. 'A lean time,' he said, 'will be followed by such a rush that we shall be asked to build new houses.' This optimism, however, was far from being shared by Mr. Boyd (who would not move with the times) and his party. Their finger was directly upon the spot in which Granby was failing; whether they moved with the times or not, they had discovered that the majority of parents had at last been awakened to the fact that merely to have been at a public school fitted their boys for nothing in the wide world. Granted that the boys developed in manliness and in many other estimable qualities, they were still left without something that was of the most vital importance—namely, the ability to make a living. England, in fact, was growing more material, more desirous to have a decided and prompt return for its money, and boys were being taken away from schools like Granby and sent to those which were alive to what was demanded.

That was the truth of the situation, but when Mr. Boyd, who was as full of courage as he was devoid of tact, was asked by his supporters to put it before the Head, a sound and curt snubbing was the only result.

Dr. Manning, following the line of least resistance, had gone over wholly to the party of Max. 'When I require any help in the management of the school, you may be sure that you will be among the first to be consulted. In the meantime, my good friend, let us be content to manage our own business,' he said, and dismissed him with a Greek quotation, which he knew that Mr. Boyd could not understand.

It was, perhaps, to Mr. Boyd's credit that he retired from this interview not chafing so bitterly from the snub that he had received, as from the fact that he had been called 'my good friend.' The florid unctuousness of the Head was abhorrent to him; but he was loyal to Dr. Manning, loyal inasmuch as he tried honestly to suppress the mutinous spirit of his supporters, because he knew that if the true condition of affairs was once noised abroad, the future of Granby would be even more ominous than it was.

So Mr. Boyd went on struggling silently against the pricks, honestly endeavouring to stir up the intellectual life of the school, giving abundant devotion and service to what he firmly believed was a sinking ship.

He was a pathetic figure, a man numbed by the consciousness of failure, yet striving to retain his enthusiasm in spite of his numbness. But Granby passed him by with the remark that 'Old Boyd seemed to be growing older every minute.'

Still, however, he went constantly to the playing-fields to listen to the enthusiasm aroused by Granby's athletes; for games, he was always ready to acknowledge, were an important part in the life of boys, and if only Granby's triumphs had not been so rigidly confined to the playing-fields, he would have rejoiced over an inter-school victory at cricket or football with a joy as sincere as Max's.

In the present condition of Granby Mr. Boyd knew

that his danger lay in becoming too critical of the man who was mainly responsible for the trouble. 'If I knew how you spend your Sunday afternoons, I should have the key to all your characters,' had seemed to him on this morning a monument of insincerity; for he knew, and imagined that every boy must know, that the Head did not make the smallest effort to find out how these Sunday afternoons were spent.

He was still thinking over this when he left the Chapel, and walked slowly towards the Big Gate at the end of the quadrangle. Then, as he approached the gate, he almost unconsciously stopped, and committed what was generally held by Granby to be the most outrageous of all crimes.

'What a rotter the Head is!' he heard a boy, who was partly concealed by a pillar, saying.

'I wish he wouldn't rub his hands together when he is preaching. I can think of nothing but soap,' another boy, who was totally concealed from Mr. Boyd, replied.

'Did you hear what he said about Sunday afternoons?'

'Yes; but I don't remember what it was.'

'He wants to know how we spend them so that he can have a key to our characters. I vote we go and tell him. Let's get as many fellows as we can to line up outside his room after morning school, and simply bombard the man. That's a regular wheeze, Joe; it will teach him not to talk bunkum.'

'He's got to say something.'

'But he might talk sense. Directly I saw "The Man" I thought he was a rotter; but the more I have to listen to him, the more I'm sure he wants someone to look after him. So I vote we go and wake him up.'

‘All right,’ Joe answered indifferently; ‘now that you’ve seen Rose safely tacked on to “The Line,” I vote we go back to the house.’

‘Rose is a blighter,’ Ormsby remarked, and turned round to find Mr. Boyd almost touching him. In his utter surprise he added ‘Halloa!’ and then took off his hat.

‘Who’s round the corner?’ Joe asked.

‘I am,’ Mr. Boyd said, and stepped into full view.

Ormsby felt an almost irresistible desire to ask him how long he had been there, but he managed to curb his curiosity. The silence, however, became so overpowering that he called attention to the fact that it was a beautiful morning, and still Mr. Boyd looked thoughtfully at him.

‘We had better get a move on to the house,’ Ormsby said to Joe.

‘Wait a minute,’ Mr. Boyd said, and stepped aside for some boys to pass him.

‘He’s heard what I said,’ Ormsby whispered quickly to Joe.

‘I don’t think he’s in a bait,’ Joe replied.

‘You are right,’ Mr. Boyd turned to Ormsby and told him. ‘I hear a great deal that is not intended for my ears. I can’t help it.’

‘It must be awfully awkward,’ Ormsby ventured to remark, and Mr. Boyd turned from him to Joe.

‘In this case I could have helped hearing the part of your conversation that was not whispered, but I stood deliberately behind the gate,’ he said.

Without intention Joe slightly shook his head.

‘What might your opinion of this action of mine be?’ Mr. Boyd asked him.

‘It isn’t quite——’ Ormsby began, but was immediately interrupted.

‘I was asking your friend,’ he said.

'I don't think you ought to have done it,' Joe blurted out, and felt the colour mounting furiously to his face.

'I agree with you,' Mr. Boyd returned. 'My excuse is that I was so interested in your conversation that I listened without thinking.'

'We were talking without thinking. We always do,' Ormsby took the opportunity to assure him.

'That may be true of you, but I doubt if it's true of——' he obviously stopped for Joe to supply his name.

'Rumbold,' Joe added, and from habit looked hard to see how it would be received.

'Oh!' was all that Mr. Boyd said, and looked more disappointed than overwhelmed.

'My name is Ormsby; we are in Mr. Lomax's,' was the next information given to Mr. Boyd.

'Naturally,' he said; 'and as I am going towards your house I wish you both to come with me.'

In that short walk Joe and Ormsby had to listen to a very different view of Granby, and of their obligations to it, from any they had previously heard. To call masters 'rotters,' to treat them as opponents if not as actual enemies, to despise them for their eccentricities, and to be blind to their good qualities, was, they were told, the easiest way to become useless to themselves and to everybody else. 'Take up a cynical attitude, begin to sneer at Granby and at the Head of Granby, and you are more than half-way to being "rotters" yourselves. If,' he went on, and turned suddenly upon Ormsby, 'you were a little older, you would deserve to be shot as a traitor for saying such things about the man who is the Chief of this School. Give up now, and for the rest of your time here, the inclination to sneer at men who are serving you. Remember you are a part of the place,

and that it is your duty to work with all your might for the good of it. Play with all your might, too; but bear in mind that your first duty is to work. Don't waste the main thing Granby has to offer you, because it is far easier to be content with something quite secondary and unimportant.'

'What do you mean, sir? I don't——' Ormsby began.

'I mean,' Mr. Boyd replied, 'that dropping goals is a very praiseworthy habit, but reaching them is a better one. You ought to have come here definitely determined to get such an education, that you will be fit when you leave to take a place in the world. That ought to be your goal.'

'I am not sure that it isn't,' Ormsby remarked.

'You ought to be sure that it is.'

'I'll try to be,' Ormsby replied, and having reached Max's house he looked longingly at the windows.

'And what do you think about it?' Mr. Boyd asked Joe.

'It's all most frightful sense,' Joe stammered. 'I mean I'm sure it's all right, but it's most awfully difficult.'

'So it may be, but it is worth trying for. Surely it is what your parents send you here to do.'

'I don't know,' Joe said, and then hastened to correct himself. 'My father,' he added, 'is, I think, most keen for me to get into the eleven and fifteen.'

It was on the tip of Mr. Boyd's tongue to say what he thought of Mr. Rumbold, but with an effort he restrained himself and turned abruptly to Ormsby.

'At any rate,' he said, 'I hope you will be a little more ambitious.'

Then he left them without another word, and as he walked on to his home he found himself wondering whether Max would thank him for talking in such

a way to his boys, and whether it had been fair to spur them on to work when they would find such powerful discouragements in front of them. 'In a sense,' he thought, 'it is treachery to say such things to Lomax's boys, and anyhow it is waste of time talking to any Rumbold, except William.' After that he allowed himself one smile at the Head reminding a boy constantly of soap.

Joe and Ormsby waited for a moment until he had disappeared round the corner, and then went into the house.

'Well, of all the queer old birds that ever hopped my way, he's the rummiest,' Ormsby said. 'Isn't he old Boyd, the Head of the Modern?'

'Yes,' Joe answered, 'and he's got a sister who keeps house for him. He used to have Bonham's house, but he gave it up years ago.'

'Two sermons on one morning,' Ormsby exclaimed.

'I'm rather *for* Boyd,' Joe said aggressively.

'Anyway he didn't seem much for you; he looked as if he'd a pain inside when you told him your name.'

'I know,' Joe replied.

At this Ormsby began quietly to chuckle, until Joe at last was compelled to ask him to stop.

'You tickle me bang under the fifth rib, but you'll overdo it if you aren't careful. You'll get "not being a Rumbold" on the brain if you don't watch it,' Ormsby said.

'Not after last night.'

'What are you driving at?'

'That brute Rose letting me off, and you being tossed, although you spouted your stuff bang through.'

'Not bang through; I had thirty-two more verses,' Ormsby corrected.

'At any rate you spouted enough.'

'More than enough,' Ormsby again corrected.

'I am going to fight Cole; it is the only way to keep his mouth shut,' Joe announced.

The dinner-bell prevented Ormsby from protesting, but during dinner he looked at both Cole and Joe, and was convinced that a fight between them must end in the complete discomfiture—and almost obliteration—of Joe's features.

'Are we going for a walk?' Arkwright looked across the table at Ormsby and asked.

'You must take Street out for some gentle exercise this afternoon. He wants it,' Ormsby replied.

'Why can't he come with us—he always does?' Joe said.

'Because I want to talk seriously to you, and the Infant asks so many questions that he makes me dizzy.'

'I've had enough serious talking for one day,' Joe informed him.

'So have I,' he agreed; 'but we have got to go through with it.'

Having again told the beseeching Arkwright that it was his duty to exercise Street, Ormsby hurried Joe from the house before anyone else could volunteer to go with them.

'We'll steer straight for Middleton Hill, and as soon as we get in the sun and out of the wind we'll sit down. Then I'll talk seriously,' Ormsby said.

But when they arrived at a 'sitting-down place,' Ormsby found that Joe's determination to fight Cole was not to be shaken. 'You'll get smashed to little bits,' he told him.

'I'd rather be smashed to atoms than feel like I do now,' was the reply.

Then Ormsby heard that Joe had already tried to fight Cole, and was angry that he had not been told

of this before. 'You keep things so blooming dark,' he expostulated.

'There's something else I haven't told you,' Joe began ; but Ormsby had jumped up to throw a stone at a rabbit, and when he returned he was overflowing with words. But Joe was as obstinate as Ormsby was loquacious.

'Where will you fight him?' the latter asked at last. 'You can't fight in the house ; it would be stopped in half a minute.'

'Here, anywhere ; I don't care,' Joe replied.

'Let's go down this blooming hill and find a place. We may as well do the thing decently if you mean to do it.'

Joe got up at once, and ran down the hill until they reached the meadows lying at the bottom. Then, after Ormsby had carefully viewed the ground, he selected a spot that was protected from the public view by high hedges.

'There's water in this ditch. We shall want water,' he said, and then once more beseeched Joe not to start on such a hopeless business. 'He's twice your size ; he's got a fist like a sledge-hammer, and it's pretty well a certainty that he'll knock your head off,' he said.

The time, however, came to start back to Granby without Joe's determination being in the least shaken.

'If you really mean it, of course I shall have to see you through this,' Ormsby said.

'Good,' Joe replied ; 'the sooner the better.'

So on that same evening Ormsby, having taken the matter in hand, went into Cole's room.

'Halloa, what have I done to deserve this?' was Cole's greeting.

'I've come on business,' Ormsby said.

'I can't lend you any money, if that's what you are after,' Cole told him.

'I'd rather borrow money from the boot-boy. I've brought you a challenge to fight.'

'Where is it? Let's have a look at it,' Cole said, and began to laugh.

'It's in my head,' Ormsby informed him.

'Then get it out,' Cole roared; but he received this challenge with such wholesale scorn that Ormsby had great difficulty in delivering it properly.

At last, however, Cole agreed to appear at 3 p.m. on the following Wednesday afternoon—when there was a School match, and no football for the juniors—and at the chosen place.

If Joe expected to be soundly thrashed in this fight, he was at any rate eager to get it over and done with; for during every spare moment of the two days following the challenge, Ormsby gave him advice and 'tips.' 'Go in at him quick; he'll be slow at starting. Bang, bang, and out of his reach. Let him run you about, and then when he's winded get at him again. Keep him moving; slip out of his way; let him beat the air. He'll lose his temper; punching and missing will upset him; and don't, for mercy's sake, let him get his great fists home on your face.'

But it was a depressed Ormsby who left the house on that Wednesday afternoon, with a sponge bulging from his pocket. A fine and wetting drizzle was falling, and Ormsby felt as if he was on his way to the funeral of his best friend.

'Chuck it, Joe,' he said. 'No one can fight in this weather.'

'I like a wet wicket,' Joe replied, and smiled most cheerfully. Indeed, on this dreary walk Joe was prevented from pondering over what might be going to happen to him by the fact that his second and

supporter had sunk into a state of preternatural gloom, and had to be made less doleful.

‘Never,’ Ormsby thought, ‘had a martyr gone to the stake with a more abandoned skittishness.’ But none of Joe’s efforts could make him smile.

They arrived in the dripping meadows ten minutes before the appointed hour, and stood waiting under the shelter of the hedge. Two blackbirds and a robin came to have a look at them; and a rabbit, undeterred by the driving rain, sat at the mouth of its burrow and gazed in their direction.

‘Confound the brute, staring like that!’ Ormsby said.

The Middleton Church clock struck three, and Ormsby walked out to inspect the ground.

‘You’d better choose to fight with your back to the hedge, it’s less slippery; I’ve marked it all out,’ he said when he came back.

‘I don’t believe Cole is coming,’ Joe remarked.

‘Of course he’s coming,’ Ormsby replied, and then added: ‘but he will be a silly ass if he does. I’m nearly wet through.’

‘It’s trickling down my back,’ Joe admitted.

‘Swing your arms about—keep warm. It’s his game to keep us waiting.’

Joe swung his arms about, and then, urged by Ormsby, quietly exercised himself by running along the side of the hedge.

‘Warmer?’ Ormsby asked him.

‘Not much.’

For half an hour they crouched under the shelter of the hedge, and listened to the steady dripping from the trees. A mist began to roll along the valley, and gradually became thicker and thicker.

‘It’s twenty to four,’ Joe said, ‘and I’ve exercised my arms until they ache.’

'We'd better go home. You've had your shot at fighting him ; now it's my turn.'

'I'm blown if it is !' Joe replied, but his teeth chattered.

'I might have guessed he'd play some mouldy dodge of this kind,' Ormsby said ; and then they ceased to discuss Cole, for the fog was so dense that they had the greatest difficulty in finding their way.

Wet through, tired, and thoroughly out of temper, they managed to get back to Max's five minutes before lock-up, and when they entered the house they found Cole and Piper waiting for them.

'Had a good time ?' the latter asked, and then began to laugh at the top of his voice.

'You've funked,' Joe replied, and stood stolidly in front of Cole.

'Take that,' Ormsby said, and as he spoke he gave Piper's cheek a smack that sounded.

Piper went to the ground in the rush following the blow, and Ormsby was sent staggering to the wall. But before the contest could be continued, Armitage strolled through the door, and stood between Cole and Ormsby.

'What's all this about ?' he asked.

'Ormsby hit me,' Piper replied ; and while Armitage was still looking at him, he added : 'Ormsby and Rumbold have been sloping ; they didn't watch the footer match.'

'You dirty little sneak,' Armitage said. 'What you want is a jolly good licking, and if you don't clear off quick I'll give it you.'

He stood in the passage until the four squeaklings had disappeared into their rooms, and then he strolled away. Never before had he interfered in any row, but with Palmer as head of the house, and nearly

always asleep, it was necessary for someone to look after things.

So on that same evening Armitage girded up enough energy to see Max, and when Joe and Ormsby went to bed, anxious for things to happen, they found that Cole had been moved into another dormitory, and that a cypher called Smythe had taken his place.

CHAPTER XIII

THE SCRIBE

ON the following morning Ormsby was still sleeping when a most apologetic-looking Arkwright appeared in his cubicle.

'I say,' the Infant began, and gave the sleeper a gentle shake.

'What's up?' Ormsby asked, and then, looking dreamily at his visitor, added: 'Oh, it's you, Did-dums. Well, I'm not at home. You oughtn't to have been shown in. I shall sack my head-footman.'

Whereupon he turned over, and snored loudly.

'You told me the other day that only pigs and Cole snore,' Arkwright said. 'Besides I'm ill, and came to tell you.'

At this Ormsby ceased to snore, and sat up in bed.

'How ill are you, Face-Ache?' he asked.

'I've got a temperature of 102.5,' Arkwright answered, not without pride.

'Make it 110, and I'll get up. Does the 5 recur? That makes a lot of difference.'

'It's over four degrees above normal,' Arkwright replied, 'and I feel simply vile.'

'Of course you know how you feel, but how do you know what your temperature is?' Ormsby asked.

'Because I have got three clinical thermometers in my cubicle.'

'And Joe told me that you collected moths and butterflies!' Ormsby said.

'So I do. I don't really collect thermometers; they just came. I've not been to sleep for more than ten minutes at a time.'

'Then you'd better go back to bed quick and stay there. I'll go and see the Matron as soon as I'm dressed. I hope you aren't going to be ill, Diddums; things are going to happen, and we shall miss you,' Ormsby told him.

'I feel as if I was going to die,' Arkwright said, and then went back to bed.

'I'll get up and wake Joe. He'll know what's the matter with you,' Ormsby assured him; and presently he and Joe met in the invalid's cubicle for a consultation.

At sight, however, Joe discovered that Arkwright was feeling far too ill to be cheered up by Ormsby's peculiar ministrations.

'We'd better clear out; he's got a splitting headache,' Joe said.

'I think I'm going to die; I feel just as if I'm going to die,' Arkwright moaned.

'I call that really ungrateful of you, after all the trouble you've given me. Buck up, man, and don't begin to blub because you aren't feeling quite fit,' Ormsby said, and looked contemptuously at the patient.

'Don't rot him; he's bad,' Joe remarked, and went out of the cubicle.

'I'm ashamed of Diddums,' Ormsby said, as he followed Joe; 'as soon as he gets a bit of pain, he forgets he's not a baby. It's simply hopeless trying to do anything for such a fellow.'

'Anyhow, we'd better leave him alone now,' Joe answered; but when the coast was clear, he returned to Arkwright's cubicle.

'You're all shivery,' he said. 'Here's one of my blankets.'

'Thanks awfully. I'm sorry Ormsby doesn't think I'm ill; you might tell him I am,' the Infant replied in a most tremulous whisper.

'Don't bother about him,' Joe said. 'What you've got to do is to get well, and not think you're dying. Can I do anything else?'

'I wish——' the Infant began, and failed to finish.

'Wish what?' Joe asked.

'If you'll promise not to tell Ormsby, there's a rubber hot-water bottle hidden underneath my shirts in the bottom drawer. Could you fill it without anybody seeing?'

'At any rate, I can try,' Joe told him; and, putting the bottle inside his pyjamas, he left the dormitory.

'Thanks most awfully,' Arkwright said, when Joe returned. 'Ormsby found out I filled it every night, and made me promise to give it up. I don't think he would mind now that I am ill.'

'Of course he wouldn't,' Joe assured him; but the Infant as an invalid was almost more than he could suffer gladly. 'I'll look in again before I go down; and keep your tail up, or you'll be much worse,' he added, and went back to his own cubicle.

Without doubt Arkwright, now that he felt really ill, was making the most of his illness, and his voice was more plaintively invalidish than any that Joe and Ormsby had ever heard; but to do him justice, he had been unwell for two or three days, and had made an heroic effort to pretend that he was not. This he confided to Joe and Ormsby when they went

to see him again, but Ormsby was so disgusted with his complete surrender that he did not pretend to believe it.

‘I thought I’d cured you of blubbing, Ugly,’ he said, and made him more miserable.

But in the course of the next few days Ormsby had opportunity to blame himself for being so unkind. Arkwright retired from the dormitory to the house sick-room, and presently was removed to the sanatorium.

At first no one could find out what was the matter with him, but by the end of the week it was known that both Arkwright and a Bonhamite had got scarlet fever, and that the Infant was very ill.

When epidemics of various kinds had periodically swept through the school, Max had always received them with far more irritation than alarm. ‘If boys must have measles and mumps, they might have the decency to get them in the holidays,’ he had once said to an astonished doctor; and as the latter did not hesitate to repeat this remark, Max obtained a reputation for callousness that he did not altogether deserve. The truth was that he loved routine, and detested anything that upset the steady flow of events. For minor illnesses he neither felt nor professed any sympathy whatever, but if a boy in his house or in the School Fifteen seriously injured himself at football, his kindness was proverbial. He was, in short, a man of such profound inconsistencies that no small boy could ever understand him, and even those who were under his charge for five or six years not infrequently left him with a very indistinct impression of what sort of man he was. That Arkwright, who had not been of the smallest importance when he was well, should suddenly have the audacity to catch scarlet fever, made Max chafe childishly over

the fact that it was possible for such a nonentity to upset the whole house.

'The most useless boy we have got ; no physique, and no chance of ever having any. I never gave him a moment's thought until he took it into his head to get ill,' he said to Mrs. Max.

The time had long since past when Mrs. Max had begged him to be careful what he said, and at this naïve confession of neglected duty she only smiled. For better or worse, to his best friend or worst enemy, she had come to know that he would blurt out his thoughts with a total disregard of consequences ; and in a way she admired his utter recklessness, though she had often to suffer for it.

'It is silly to be angry with Arkwright,' she replied, 'for he does not want to be shut up for weeks in the sanatorium.'

'That isn't the point ; and if I am angry with anyone, it is with Arkwright's outrageous parents, who have never brought him up to fight against the mildest germ ever hatched,' he said.

'Mrs. Arkwright is a Christian Scientist,' Mrs. Max told him.

'As long as she keeps away from here, she may be an esoteric Buddhist, for all I care,' he returned.

'She is here already ; she came yesterday.'

'Why didn't you tell me ?'

'She is going to be tiresome. I think you had better let me try to reason with her a little.'

'Where is she staying ?'

'She has taken rooms. You will have to see her soon, but I will try to prevent her from bothering you.'

'It's too bad that you should be plagued by such women,' Max said, 'and just when things were going swimmingly. The House Cup was simply waiting

for us to win ; it was only a question of how many points we should win it by ; and now comes this scarlet fever, and if any boy sneezes twice, the Matron is scared to death. Supposing either Orde or Temperley get ill ; our reserve halves aren't worth that much,' and Max loudly snapped his fingers.

' You forget,' Mrs. Max reminded him, ' that Chetwood, in Mr. Bonham's, is also ill.'

' He's the most irresponsible boy who ever lived. He'd get anything that is to be got, and forget that he'd got it. Besides,' he added, ' he is in Bonham's,' and Mrs. Max could not save herself from smiling.

' Really,' she said, ' you are as sorry for Arkwright and Chetwood as I am.'

' Of course I'm sorry,' he admitted ; ' but it is no good to sit down and cry. All the same, I'll never forgive these boys if we get an epidemic and lose the cup.'

Scarlet fever having appeared in the school, it did not occur to Max that a less serious disease could also come and add to his worries. A few days, however, after he had poured forth his troubles to Mrs. Max, boys began to be stricken right and left by mumps, and one of the first victims was Orde. Arkwright by this time was seriously ill, and although Mrs. Max went about her duties with her accustomed cheerfulness, she had to call up all her reserves of courage and strength.

Mrs. Arkwright was a perpetual nuisance, and bombarded Mrs. Max with notes demanding immediate answers, or with visits of inordinate length. Five boys in the house were ' down ' with mumps, and although Mrs. Max was thankful that they were so few, three of their mothers were expressing totally unnecessary anxiety. But Max himself was the greatest trial of all, for he jumped from one mood to another

with even more than his accustomed quickness, and in his excessive desire to ward off illness from the boys in his house he moved the almost imperturbable Palmer to a state of wrath and indignation.

'We are bound to win the cup,' Palmer said to Rose, 'but if Max worries me much more, I shall be thundering glad if we lose it.'

'He's most frantically keen,' Rose admitted.

'He's absolutely dotty, and goes sniffing round as if we were a lot of babies. I'm fed up with him, and if he goes on bothering me, I shall ask if he is running the fifteen, or if I am.'

'He'll probably say that he is,' Rose replied.

'Then let him; I've had enough. I didn't come here to be goaded to death,' Palmer said.

'The trouble is with the scrum-half, now Orde is ill,' Rose remarked, and gazed at the ceiling of Palmer's room.

'Savage is good enough; at any rate we beat the Grahamites by fifty-five points.'

'But Savage was limping and useless long before the end, and his knee might give way altogether at any time.'

'There's no one else,' Palmer said.

'There's young Rumbold,' Rose suggested.

'He's too small; he'd be swallowed up in a cuppie.'

'He's plenty of pluck, and he's quick.'

'Well, tell him to train; but we'll play Savage in the semi-final. We could beat the Prestonites if our halves had only one leg between them.'

And with this Rose had for the moment to be content, but by hook or crook he meant Joe to be chosen to play in the final.

* * * * *

With illness hanging over the school, the last weeks

of the term seemed to most of the squeaklings to be very long and dreary, but to Joe they were far from being unhappy ones. Twice a week he wrote long letters to Arkwright, in which he related all the news about everyone except himself, and in nearly every letter the Infant was told that Ormsby had promised to write in a day or two. But the term came to an end without Ormsby having redeemed his promise, and then on the second day of his holidays he sat down solidly and told the Infant much that Joe had completely omitted.

‘ MY DEAR FACE-ACHE (he wrote),

‘ We are all most awfully glad you are so much better ; just buck up and come back as soon as you can next term. If you want a change in the holidays, you had better come here. The name of the house is The Priory, Ledstone, Herefordshire, and its bang on the top of the hills, and you can be blown inside out if you want to be. I’ve always been meaning to write, only never got going, and Joe is such a nailer at that sort of game ; but I’ll bet he never told you much about himself, so this is going to be all about him. Take a long breath ; there’s going to be a precious lot of it. It’s snowing, and I’ve got nobody to talk to and nothing to do.

‘ Until after you got ill I never really found out what sort of chap Joe is. I liked him all right, because you can’t help liking a fellow who is as straight as string, and nearly bursts himself with laughing when most fellows would grouse like mad. But I always kept on remembering that he was a Rumbold, and born to be great. Every moment I expected him to come out in a rash of greatness, side a bit, and that sort of thing. Now I know that he is as different from his mighty brethren as cheese (not

Max's) is from chalk. Not that all the brethren are bad sorts. I've not seen the eldest, but there's one called Jumpy who came here and mouched around just like Palmer—sort of half-asleep until he begins playing something, and never seems to say anything. Then Bingo came again a few days ago. He'd got two tries in the 'Varsity match, and was awfully sick with Joe. If someone walked up behind Mr. Bingo and gave him a terrific boot, I should like to be there to cheer. Side! It's absolutely colossal, and he thinks Joe a worm, so I jolly well let him know that our room was as much mine as Joe's. That didn't help much, but I had to show that I couldn't stand him. But the one Joe calls Pads is quite a good sort. He's a bit Rumboldish in a way—seemed to be overcovered with light blue scarfs and things—but he isn't half such a blighter as Bingo, and he's quite decent to Joe.

'I must start on a new sheet. It's still snowing, and now I've begun I shan't stop for ages. When I was about ten, my father used to make me write letters to all sorts of queer dead people. I've told Cicero just what I thought of him, and I've pitched it into both Gladstone and Disraeli pretty hot. Then I've written to Tennyson, Darwin, Garibaldi, Louis XIV., Queen Elizabeth, Adam Smith—that was an awful job—Perkin Warbeck, Gustavus Adolphus, Henty, Shakespeare, Christopher Columbus, and plenty of other old chaps who never got my letters. Jolly funny way of spending wet days, but my father used to give me a sort of lecture, and I had to write it down afterwards as well as I could, and then he corrected it. Awful waste that they never got it; and what bucks me up in writing to you is that this will really be posted, and I shall find out whether you ever read it. I'll break you in two, Diddums,

if you don't. The best letter I ever wrote was to James II. ; I did give him beans.

' However, this was all to be about Joe, but I must have a holiday every now and then. Well, after you were bundled into the Sanny, we had no end of a time. Joe, Harper, and I went one morning to see the Head, to tell him how we spent our Sunday afternoons ; a sort of friendly visit, we meant it to be, and Street was to have come, only he got kept in. I was to begin, Joe go second, and then old Harper ; but the Man looked so different in his room, and was so surprised and not a bit pleased to see us, that I got hiccoughs—I should say the worst hiccoughs ever hiccoughed—a regular break of them. That put me clean out of action. Then Joe got the giggles, and Harper could do nothing but get a terrific move on with his Adam's apple. The Man simply fell upon us for cheek, and licked the lot of us. He isn't half such an ass as I thought him.

' Then there was this business with Cole, and I'll bet you haven't heard a word about that. You know Cole well enough, so it's no good me jawing about him. He'd got his knife into Joe over that singing job and other things, and so Joe made up his mind to fight him. I was scared silly that he'd about murder Joe, so I tried all I could to stop it ; but when Joe's mind is made up, I don't believe a blooming thumb-screw would undo it. At last I tried to fix up the fight in a field under Middleton Hill, and Cole three times promised to come, and every time we went there and waited for him. But he scored off us properly and never came. Twice it rained, and altogether we were about fed up. But we couldn't fight in the house, for it isn't *done*, and someone would have stopped it in about half a minute. Cole just laughed whenever he saw us, and so did Piper, until I caught

Piper in the dormitory by himself, and after that he never laughed unless he was with Cole. But nothing really happened worth talking about, until Palmer stuck up the list to play in the final cup-tie against the Frenshamites. Two scrum-halves, Orde and Savage, were either ill or crocked, and I was standing by Joe, and pretty close to Cole, when we saw that J. Rumbold was down to play. Joe simply never spoke, but he blushed sort of brick-red, and then began to look furious; but Cole capped everything by saying something that would get him sacked from a pigstye.

I was jolly surprised that Joe walked off without a word, but when he came into our room about half an hour after he was as cheerful as anything. He did not tell me then what he had done, but I found out soon afterwards, and though he made me swear not to tell the chaps in our dormitory, I'll risk telling you.

Well, Joe's pretty wily, though he's so precious quiet, and he'd found out that if you are in a hole, the chap to go to in our house is Armitage. So bang down to Armitage's room he walked, and just explained things. He said that he wasn't going to play in this cup-tie, because the only reason he was on the list was because Rose had got him put there. Then Armitage asked him if he was funky that he'd get smashed up, and Joe said: "No, I'm not funkking it; but I expect everyone will say that I am." Armitage told him that of course they would, so to prove he wasn't a funk, Joe asked Armitage if he could arrange for him to fight Cole. Then Armitage asked a lot of questions which Joe couldn't answer, because to get Cole licked wasn't what he was out for.

Soon afterwards, Palmer, West, and Rose came into the room, and Joe had a fairly rough time of it;

but I suppose all of them really knew that Joe wouldn't have been chosen to play if he hadn't been Bingo's brother, and when Rose got baity and called Joe a funk, Armitage told him to shut up talking such skittles.

"A funk," Armitage said, "wouldn't come here like this. He'd pretend to be ill."

'But Palmer was angry, because he thought the team was settled, and he'd have to think about it again; and West said Joe was cracked, and Rose stamped around and declared he'd wire to Bingo, and all sorts of rot of that kind. But Joe wouldn't budge, though he says he didn't know that he would ever have stuck to it if he hadn't somehow guessed that Armitage thought he was right. In the end they decided to have a trial game in the field next day, and in that game—though I say it as shouldn't—I played better than I ever had before, and so did Joe, who part of the time played scrum-half against me. But though Joe got the ball pretty often, he's lighter than I am, and got bowled over a lot. At the time I didn't know what this game was for, but I knew that evening when a new list was put up, and my name was on it instead of Joe's. So I played, and we beat the Frenshamites by thirty-three points to eight, and old Max was as pleased as Punch. Of course, I don't get any colours, because Orde is really the scrum-half; but I'm bound to be pretty high up in the second fifteen next term, and Joe just let go what would have been a jolly good start. Armitage told me some of this, because I suppose he thought I might fancy myself too much, and I pumped the rest out of Joe.

* * * * *

'It is two days since I began this letter, for it didn't snow yesterday and I tobogganed; but to-day it is

snowing hard again, and my pater wanted me to write a letter to Euripides. But I got out of it by saying I was writing a long letter to a fellow who is ill; so you, Ugly, have saved me from something.

There were three men staying here last night, all of them professors of something, and one of them got a thing called the Nobel Prize. Dinner lasted over two hours, and the servants kept bobbing in and out, until at last, thank goodness, we got driven out of the room. The youngest of this lot, and he's about forty, had a queer, fishy sort of face, and a long straight slit of a mouth, which he seemed to twist round the bottom of his ears when he smiled. I could never get really keen on such a chap, but he was rather different from the usual ruck, and he made my father in an awful bait by saying that it is impossible to exaggerate the non-importance of almost everything. He got simply sat upon for saying this, and I know I've got it right, because during the last hour or two of that awful meal I kept on muttering it over and over, so that I could tell it to Joe. I mean to tell it to him because he thinks "not being a Rumbold" too jolly important. It's all very well not sponging on his blessed brethren, but he's neck-deep in making the very least of himself, and my first job next term will be to knock the stuffing out of that.

Joe sort of went into winter-quarters until we had got the cup, and then he told me, as if he was asking for the butter, that he was going to fight Cole the next afternoon. It was an extra half, and how he managed to bring Cole up to the scratch is too long a story, and it is only about half snowing now. Well, Diddums, that was a fight, and no blooming mistake about it. I seconded Joe, and Piper seconded Cole; but Piper—silly ass!—didn't bring a sponge or anything, because he thought he'd come to see Cole wipe the

floor with Joe. So Cole would have if they had settled things in the room, but they fought on that old field at the bottom of Middleton Hill, in a ring about as big as a circus.

‘My stars, Face-Ache, I was in a funk before they began. Cole seemed bulkier than ever, and scowled a lot, but Joe looked as if someone had just tipped him a fiver. Not that he thought he had any earthly chance, only he was jolly glad to get face to face with the fellow who could say such beastly things. At last I had to call “Time,” and then Cole grinned. So did Joe, and that was all that happened for about half a minute. Cole said, “Why don’t you begin, since you are so precious anxious?” but Joe just stood where he was, and didn’t answer. At last Piper gave a cackling laugh, and that sent Cole lurching forward; but Joe slipped out of his way, and Cole slipped up. Joe waited for him to get up, and then hit him, “dab, dab,” pretty quick; the first caught him on the nose, and then Joe slipped out of his way again like an eel. At the end of the round Piper wanted to borrow my sponge, but didn’t like to ask for it.

‘During the next two rounds nothing really happened, for Cole just beat the air and lunched around, trying for all he was worth to land Joe a real one. He talked all the time, but Joe never said a word, and just watched him and watched him. The air got some pretty fine ones I can tell you, but they missed Joe by yards; and at the end of the third round Cole was blowing like a grampus, and though Joe was pretty pumped he was all right long before it was time to start again. Then he went in like a flash of lightning—“dab, dab”—before Cole knew where he was; but it was like hitting a hayrick, and I was crazy lest Joe would get too bold and be laid out flat.

‘But Joe knew what he was up against, and never

let Cole have a chance during the rest of that round, or during the fifth. And when the sixth began, Cole and Piper said that it was time to settle it—at least, Piper did, for Cole was so blown to the world that he could hardly speak.

““ Let him run you about another round or two, and you’ve got him,” I told Joe ; but he was getting a bit tired of Piper’s jeers, and went straight for Cole as soon as I called time. That very nearly finished him, for Cole landed him one plumb on the chest and knocked him clean over. By a bit of luck, Cole overbalanced himself or slipped up or something, and went over too, and by the time he was up and ready Joe was on his legs again. At the end of that round I fairly let Joe have it—told him he was committing suicide, and all sorts of things. So the seventh and eighth round only saw Cole making air-shots, and blowing harder than ever.

“ After that I had a splendid time, only I was always afraid that Joe would be caught in the end. Cole was simply floundering about, while Joe danced round, giving him one here and one there—“ dab, dab, and out of his reach,” “ dab, dab again, and away.” You never saw anything so absolutely top-hole. Joe just dodged until Cole had lost his wind, and then towards the end of every round went in on him and touched him up. By this time Piper was screaming with excitement, but Cole could do nothing without any wind to do it with ; and though Joe gave him some fairish ones, he couldn’t really hurt such an enormous lump. At the end of the twelfth round Joe spoke to Cole for the first time, and asked him if he had had enough. “ Not if you’ll stand up and fight,” Cole said.

“ “ I am fighting,” Joe answered.

“ “ You do nothing but run away,” Piper shouted.

“ “ Why is Cole’s nose bleeding ? ” I asked, and that broke off all jaw about peace.

‘ But at the end of three more rounds Cole was simply blue in the face, and looked as if he was going to burst.

“ “ I’m ready to stop, if you’ll beg my pardon for saying what you did,” Joe told him.

“ “ What did I say ? ” Cole panted ; and Joe jolly soon let him know.

‘ After that we talked a desperate long time ; but until I told Piper that I would punch his head unless he kept his mouth shut, we didn’t get much forrader. I said, too, that the fight anyway was over, because if it wasn’t it ought to have been going on ages ago.

‘ Whether Cole ever did apologize or not, I’m blowed if I know ; but, at any rate, he said that he would never call Joe any more names, and in the end we all walked back to Granby together. Every now and then he looked at Joe as if he would like to fall on him suddenly and squash him, but on the whole he behaved rather decently considering that all the marks above the collar were on his face. Joe, of course, now declares that the whole thing is ended, and that Cole is probably a good sort when you get to know him. But I’m not so sure ; there’s Piper in this business, and if he begins to laugh at Cole, there’ll be trouble. I shall watch it next term.’

THE END.

‘ P.S.—I nearly forgot to say that Joe was easy top of our class, and that his mother came to the prize-giving. She’s about IT. Buck up and get well. That I’m such a scribe is due to my father making me write such long letters that I can’t write a short one. I am going to begin my “ Life of Max ” these holidays. It is to be in ten volumes.’

CHAPTER XIV

BOOK AND BRUSH

DURING the last few years Mrs. Rumbold had been a frequent visitor to the Granby playing-fields, for her sons had held tenaciously to a superstition that they excelled themselves when she was present.

'If,' Flip had once told her, when a drop at goal had passed a few inches under the bar, 'you had only been there, I should have dropped that goal to a certainty, and we should have won the match instead of drawing.'

So to do what she could to prevent such upsetting mishaps, she had often been over to Granby when matches were being played.

For her lack of spontaneous interest in the tries her sons got and in the runs they made, she blamed herself unceasingly. It was an irony of fate that she, who was sprung from a family with more mind than muscle, should be the mother of four sons who almost openly despised the things in which she delighted. Fond of them she was, but it would be untrue to say that she was satisfied with them. They took life too easily, and were—with the exception of Pads—sublimely unconscious that duties were owing to anyone save themselves.

So when Joe began to show that he was different

from his brothers, Mrs. Rumbold was at first very happy and then very frightened. Never, she knew, could there have been a household in which a departure from the family type was more likely to be discouraged and scorned. Moreover, she guessed rightly that Joe himself knew this.

Maiden Croft still meant home to him, because he loved his mother with a love that lost nothing in warmth and gained something in intensity from seldom being expressed, and Pads he regarded as a very true friend. But for the rest he was nearly an Ishmaelite, a boy of no importance, one who lived at Maiden Croft without altogether belonging to it.

Joe's letters from Granby had not satisfied Mr. Rumbold, and his mother had listened to many serious conversations about him, in which Flip had suggested various means of making him interested in the things that were considered to 'matter.' Scarcely a word about games did Joe ever report, though in a postscript to a letter, which had contained a very long account of some freak of Ormsby's, he did say: 'We got the cup again; Ormsby played rippingly.' This indifference to affairs of importance maddened his father and Flip, and when Bingo arrived at Maiden Croft, he did nothing to lessen their displeasure. The time had come, Mr. Rumbold decreed, for strong pressure to be brought to bear upon his youngest son.

'If,' Mr. Rumbold said at an informal conference, 'Joe is doing no good at the end of a year, I shall take him away from Granby. It will be better than spoiling our record.'

'He'd get on rippingly in some country Vicarage with a few old cats and a parrot or two,' Bingo remarked.

'If you will leave Joe alone, he'll come out all right ;

he's a slow starter, but he'll get there in the end,' Pads said.

Mrs. Rumbold smiled her appreciation of this opinion. 'Isn't it rather early to judge what he is going to do?' she asked. But the time for Mr. Rumbold to judge anything or anybody was at the moment when he felt judicial.

'Joe is throwing away his opportunities,' he stated emphatically, 'and I am surprised at you for suggesting that it is too early to think of taking him away, when I do not believe that you ever wanted him to go there.'

But if he expected Mrs. Rumbold to set his suspicions at rest on this point, he was disappointed. For it was true that she had not wanted Joe to go to Granby, and had not her opinion of his start been totally unlike the general one she would not have been anxious for him to stop there.

Only on that morning she had received a short note from him, in which he had said: 'I rather think I have got the prize in my class. There aren't any exams. worth talking about this term—I think they've been drowned by mumps—but anyway the Man is supposed to hate exams., and there aren't going to be any. There's a sort of small prize-giving, not a big show like the summer, and I hope you will come to it. Please don't tell Bingo, or he'll laugh; but I expect he'll be here for the School concert, and if he comes, get Pads to come too.'

How to help Joe with his family was indeed an urgent problem with Mrs. Rumbold, and she did not imagine that to go over to Granby to a small prize-giving was likely to lessen his troubles. Nevertheless, she firmly resolved to go, for in her experience this was a unique occasion. At the athletic sports she had seen Flip, Pads, and Bingo (Jumpy was only

a hero at cricket and football) walk up to receive cup after cup, but never had she been invited to see any of her sons receive a prize for anything except games.

Informal as this function was, and performed at an amazing speed, Mrs. Rumbold was conscious of a real thrill of excitement when Dr. Manning said, 'J. Rumbold,' and Joe, pushing his way through the crowd, and blushing most furiously, went up to receive his prize. Perfunctory cheers were awarded to each boy who had to appear, but the decorum of the proceedings was slightly ruffled when Joe, on his return journey, was greeted by someone shouting at the top of his voice: 'Good old Joe! You have fairly got it this time.'

For such a ribald outburst of enthusiasm to take place at a prize-giving in the Big Classical was unprecedented, and Dr. Manning hastened to quell the laughter with which it was greeted.

'We are not,' he said, 'attending a football match, and if boys cannot restrain themselves, they will oblige me by leaving, or be obliged to leave, the room.'

Whereupon even the perfunctory clapping ceased, and several boys received their prizes in funereal silence. But, dismal as the proceedings were, Mrs. Rumbold was too happy to contrast the prevailing gloom with the shouts of triumph she had frequently listened to on the playing-fields, and when the last boy had received his prize she turned to leave the Big Classical with a feeling of real gratitude.

As she moved slowly through the room, she paused to read the names that were enrolled upon the walls, until at last she came to a board on which she read, 'W. D. Rumbold.' There she stopped, and while she was wondering whether Joe's name would ever find a place on these rolls of honour, she found William Rumbold standing beside her.

'I wonder you dare to come here. You have been writing the most scandalous things about public schools,' she said.

'When Ridley wrote to me that Joe was going to get a prize, I had to come and see him get it. It tickled my sense of humour,' he replied.

'Have you seen Mr. Lomax?'

'I've seen him, but he did not see me.'

'Did he cut you?'

'Dead really, though he managed to dodge me.'

'And Dr. Manning?'

'Deader!'

'You really ought to be ashamed of yourself.'

'Why do you take the trouble to say such things to me, you know perfectly well that I am right?'

'You don't make it easier for Joe.'

'Joe is only a unit, after all.'

'A unit! I don't believe you have the smallest sympathy for any human being. You only think about schemes and beating a big drum,' Mrs. Rumbold said, and walked towards the door.

'Do you honestly mean that I should shut my eyes to everything wrong in public schools because Joe happens to be at Granby?' William asked.

'I don't see that it is your place to put it right.'

'Whose place is it?'

'The governors ought to do it—if there is anything to do.'

'But suppose they are asleep.'

'Then they can be gently awakened.'

'That's what I am doing.'

'Not gently,' Mrs. Rumbold retorted, and as she passed into the quadrangle she saw Joe and Ormsby waiting for her.

But before she could speak to them Max was by her side, and doubly engaged in welcoming her and

in ignoring William Rumbold. The latter, however, was not destined to spend the day without one enthusiastic greeting, for no sooner did Joe see him than he said to Ormsby: 'My whiskers, here's old William. Come and talk to him while Max jaws to my mater.'

In a flash Ormsby grasped the situation, and it was one that mightily appealed to his sense of mischief. He could see Max turning his back on the obnoxious Rumbold who had dared to attack public schools, and he guessed that the wisest course to take was to follow his housemaster's example. Not for a moment, however, did he think of taking it. Joe was already greeting William with more warmth than dignity, and Ormsby, scenting sport, hastened to join him.

While Mrs. Rumbold stood and tried to talk to Max, she could hear Joe saying:

'What on earth brings you here? Not that I'm not jolly glad to see you. This chap is Ormsby; we live in the same room.'

'And our cubicles are next each other, and so are our desks; but next term Joe will get a double remove, and I shall be left stranded,' Ormsby added.

'I came because I wanted to see you receiving a prize,' William said so distinctly that a remark of Max's to Mrs. Rumbold broke off in the middle, and was never finished.

'Oh, skittles!' Joe told him. 'I've read your article in that *Review*, and you don't think any of us know anything. Besides, Ormsby could have got the prize if——'

'We have got your picture in our room,' Ormsby interrupted.

'What picture?' William asked.

'The thing you painted of Granby. It takes a

bit of getting used to, but we are awfully keen on it now.'

'It's pretty nearly all the furniture we have. Ormsby had schemes for our room, and they scared me silly until I found out that the more he talks, the less he does,' Joe said.

'You ought to come and see our room; it's Early Spartan. And then you'd like to see your picture again,' Ormsby told him.

'I've got to be in London by three o'clock,' William replied. 'I must see that picture when I feel stronger.'

'I think it's ripping,' Ormsby continued; and Joe, recollecting some of the awful reproaches that had from time to time been hurled at this work of art, began to giggle.

The conversation between Mrs. Rumbold and Max, beset as it had been from the first by difficulties, had reached its limit, but Max seemed as unwilling to go as he was unable to talk. A retreat was ignominious, and, additionally, William Rumbold was in the line of it. So Max at last determined to stifle some of his indignation, and to speak to the traitor. Moreover, he was allotted 'full marks' (by Ormsby in a whisper) for the surprise he showed at seeing him.

'Oh, how are you, Rumbold?' he said. 'I never expected to see you to-day. We don't often have a visit from you, though we hear from you sometimes.'

Here, indeed, was an opportunity for a pugnacious retort, but William caught a signal of distress from Mrs. Rumbold and ignored the chance.

'I am, at any rate, quite peaceable to-day, for I came to see my young cousin get his prize,' he replied.

'Well, I'm sure it is very kind of you,' Max said,

and then turned to Mrs. Rumbold: 'If you insist on taking Joe out to lunch of course I must give way, but my wife will be disappointed at not seeing you,' he added.

'I never come at the end of the term, for I know Mrs. Lomax is far too busy to want visitors,' Mrs. Rumbold told him.

'Good-bye, Joe, and good luck. I congratulate you on a capital start,' William said; and Max rushed away to speak to another master, and did not return.

'Aren't you going to lunch with us?' Mrs. Rumbold asked William.

'I must lunch in the train; I have to get back to town at once,' he replied, and held out his hand.

'It was most kind of you to come,' she said.

'And rather unfortunate,' William added, and waited for an invitation that Mrs. Rumbold could not give.

For the last five years William had spent Christmas at Maiden Croft, but now Mr. Rumbold had decreed that he was never to be asked there again.

'We've always had pity on him, because no one else can possibly want him,' Mr. Rumbold had said; 'but he'll fill Joe up with his preposterous ideas, and he is disloyal to the school that reared him. I won't see him inside my doors until he learns more common sense.'

So William went back to town knowing that he was not to have his annual fight with his cousins, and with a sense of keen disappointment. For he loved to ruffle the complacency of Maiden Croft, and now that his invitation had been withdrawn, he felt both very lonely and very pugnacious.

'I wish I had never gone near the place,' he said

to himself in the train. 'I did far more harm than good;' and these words were truer than he imagined.

For on that same night Max, with the remembrance of Joe's delight at seeing his cousin still smarting, sat down to write to Mr. Rumbold.

'If I may venture to offer a little advice,' he wrote, 'it is that Joe should not be brought too much into contact with W. D. R. Of course, William Rumbold is a successful journalist, but he does not confine himself to subjects which he understands. I am told that he is largely responsible for this correspondence in the papers about public schools, and his article in the *White Review* is an indisputable proof of his malicious ignorance. I am happy to say that I have no complaint to make about Joe's work, but in other respects he has been rather disappointing. He has not taken the place in the house that I expected him to take; he seems to be lacking in ambition, and to have very little ballast. To a boy of his temperament I am strongly of opinion that William Rumbold's influence would have nothing but a pernicious effect.

'I do not, however, wish you to think that I am entirely dissatisfied with Joe, for it is possible that I expected too much from him, and that he will develop rapidly. He appears to be popular in the house, and physically he has improved during the term; but at present he is more inclined to independence than obedience, and he does not realize that the discipline of the playing-fields is as important as the discipline of the class-room.'

Mr. Rumbold felt explosive when he read what Max had written, but he had promised that he would leave Joe in peace until after Christmas, and accordingly he took the letter to Mrs. Rumbold's room,

'Read this,' he said. 'It just bears out everything I said.'

'From Mr. Lomax?' she asked; and when she had finished the letter, she said: 'Poor Joe!'

'Why "poor Joe"?' Mr. Rumbold exclaimed. 'If you go on pitying him, he'll end in petticoats and a thimble. What he wants is a sound talking to. He wants stirring up all round.'

'I think Mr. Lomax wrote this letter when he was thoroughly angry,' Mrs. Rumbold said, and went on to explain what had happened at Granby. But she failed to appease her wrathful husband.

'Joe,' he said, 'is the fool of the family, but even he ought to have the sense to know that Lomax hates the sight of William. He has the sense, but he doesn't care, so he goes and falls into the arms of a traitor like William right before Lomax's nose.'

'Mr. Lomax's back,' Mrs. Rumbold corrected, but the correction passed unnoticed.

'And then Bingo tells me,' Mr. Rumbold continued, 'that Joe could have played in the final cup-tie if he had liked, and he refused to play because he said that he wasn't good enough. The boy is stark raving mad. If the captain of the house thinks he is good enough, he is good enough. That's what Lomax means when he talks about independence.'

'At any rate Joe was honest; he told me all about that.'

'"Honest" is what we called William, until we found out that he wasn't. Why did Joe refuse to play?'

Mrs. Rumbold told him, and at the end he said:

'Sheer rubbish! If I had been Palmer, I should have given him a good hiding.'

'Have you seen Joe's prize?' Mrs. Rumbold asked him.

‘No; where is it? If he would remember why I sent him to Granby, I should be more inclined to look at it.’

‘Here it is,’ Mrs. Rumbold said, and handed it to him.

‘Shakespeare. There are enough Shakespeares in the library already, and nobody ever looks at them,’ he complained.

‘Still, you must be glad that he has got a prize.’

‘Of course I’m glad.’

‘Then you might tell him so; he wants more encouragement than squashing.’

‘I’ll encourage him all right before his holidays are over,’ Mr. Rumbold said, and left his wife to make what she could of the promise.

She was, however, in no doubt of the form which this encouragement would take, and she determined as far as possible to save Joe from it. Maiden Croft at present was, she felt, no place for him, for though he might contrive to be happy at home, he would have to fight for his happiness, and she wanted him to be happy without any contriving or fighting.

So there and then she wrote to her sister-in-law, and accepted an invitation for him to go to Leicestershire after Christmas. Moreover, she posted this letter at once, so that the temptation to keep Joe with her should be removed.

Between, however, the time when it was known that Joe was going away and the day of his departure, he had to listen to a fusillade of advice from Flip and Bingo—advice given at high frequency, but with a minimum amount of result. For he had come to a definite conclusion that they were ‘simply dotty’ on one subject, and he had ceased to care what they said.

‘What is the good of arguing with fellows,’ he

asked himself, 'who have made up their minds that I hate all games and don't like playing them? I'm much keener than they think, only I'm not half so good as they are, and don't care a brass button for jawing footer-shop. And I'm not going to be pitchforked into a team because Rose thinks Bingo the greatest man on earth.'

The fact that Joe could have played in the final cup-tie had he wanted to was continually dinned into his ears; but although he suffered during the first days of his holidays from his brothers' persistent attentions, Mr. Rumbold, at any rate, gave him breathing-time before he attacked him. That his father was angry with him Joe knew well enough, but until he was solemnly summoned to the library he had no idea that he had so completely failed to fulfil expectations.

The library was an enormous room which the Rumbolds seldom used except for festivities, and Joe approached it with mingled feelings of importance, curiosity, and fear. His father's hostility was a real thorn in his side, and he was prepared to make great efforts to lessen it; but before this interview began he was conscious of a sense of helplessness, and when it had finished he felt more utterly miserable than he had ever been in his life.

For Mr. Rumbold started with the conviction that Joe required a rude awakening, and he treated him as if he was a clerk who had studiously neglected his responsibilities, instead of a small boy who was scarcely old enough to know that he had any. At first Joe was entirely bewildered by the parental torrent, and felt more inclined to cry than to protest. Soon, however, the injustice of this abuse banished all thought of tears, and instead of crying he uncontrollably lost his temper.

Flatly he denied Max's charge that he disobeyed the discipline of the playing-fields, and then he went on to protest that 'it was all rot' to say that he was not fond of games. And when he was accused of not taking his opportunities, he replied that he was not going to be 'stuck' in a footer team just because his name was Rumbold, and asked what good it would have been for him to have played when he knew that he was not worth his place. At one time both he and his father were shouting together, for until Joe began to regain his temper he fought most strenuously for his freedom.

But in the end he was conquered as far as words were concerned, because he could not keep at boiling-point for more than a few minutes. And then he listened silently while his father issued orders for the coming term, and pointed out the folly of his behaviour.

'If,' Mr. Rumbold concluded, 'we do not get a better report of you from Mr. Lomax, we have decided to take you away from Granby at the end of the year. We can't have our record broken by you.'

'Take me away from Granby!' Joe exclaimed, for this was the last thing he either expected or wished.

'Yes. Don't you want to leave?' his father asked.

'I should rather think I don't,' he replied, and it was impossible to doubt his sincerity.

This, however, was nearly the sole crumb of comfort that Mr. Rumbold gathered from the interview, for neither exhortations nor threats moved Joe to make any definite promises.

'Anyhow I'll try, and I'll try to keep on trying,' Joe said; but he left the library with the hopeless feeling that he would never be able to reach the family standard, and dismally conscious that success in any

other direction could never atone for a failure at athletics.

* * * * *

When Joe returned from Leicestershire, he brought with him an olive-branch in the form of a fox's brush.

'This,' he said, when he met his father in the hall of Maiden Croft, 'was given to me yesterday by the Master of the Bleakley Hounds. When it's been properly done, do you think that it might go in the Pot-Room?'

Mr. Rumbold picked up the brush, sniffed several times, and at last expressed his qualified approval of it.

'It's better than nothing,' he said, 'and when it has been mounted we will have it hung up somewhere.'

'In the Pot-Room?' Joe asked again, for his mother had told him to make this request.

'I am not sure where; perhaps the library would be a better place,' Mr. Rumbold answered; and Joe gave a short laugh.

'Have I said anything amusing?' his father asked him.

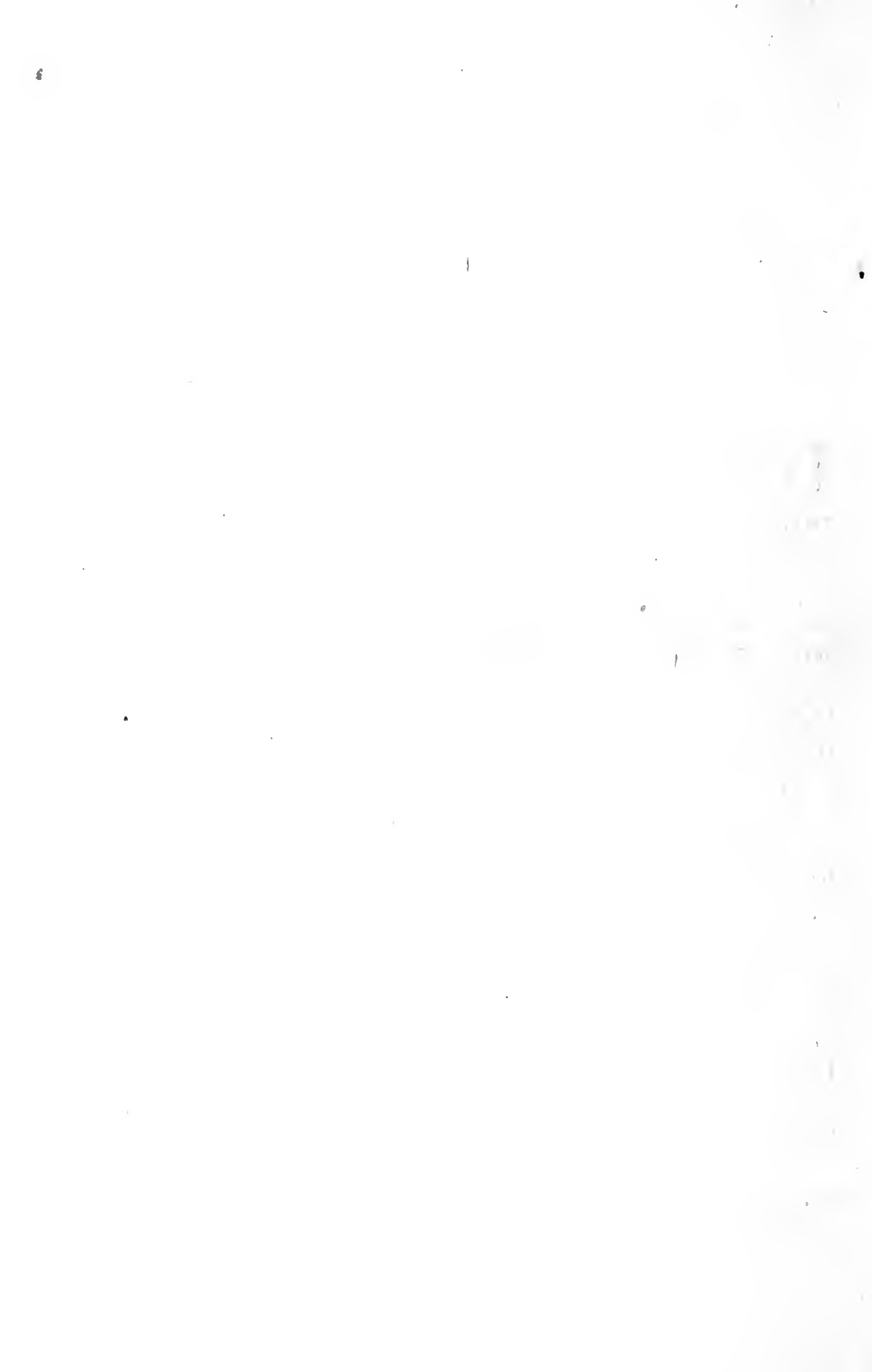
'Oh no—at least, you didn't mean it to be funny. Only the library seems a queer sort of place to stick a fox's brush,' was the unnecessarily candid reply.

'I think I am the best judge where to put it, and I wish you would get over your habit of laughing when there is nothing to laugh at,' Mr. Rumbold said.

And once more Joe replied that he would try.

BOOK II

THE RUMBOLD TRADITION



CHAPTER I

SPIDERS AND A FLY

DURING the Christmas holidays Max exercised himself so strenuously in Switzerland that he returned to Granby in an advanced state of physical exhilaration. So 'fit,' indeed, did he feel that on the first evening of the term he greeted Palmer, Armitage, West, and the other important boys of his house with an almost embarrassing familiarity.

'Here we are again,' he said, when he had summoned them to the hall, 'and there you see the footer cup in its proper place.'

Heads were turned towards this trophy of prowess, and then Max continued :

'I want to talk to you about the plan of campaign for this term. It seems to me that we ought to get every cup that is going.'

Whereupon he proceeded to enter into details, and to prepare the way for sweeping victories. In this mood he was more than a little bumptious, but at the same time his zeal was so infectious that even Palmer, who instinctively preferred to count his chickens after they were hatched, admitted that it looked as if the house was in for a good time.

'The best we have ever had, and that—without boasting—is saying a good deal. All we have to do is to keep awake, and not be too sure of ourselves.'

Whereupon the conference became infected by the spirit of back-patting, until Max said: 'Will one of you send Rumbold to me?' and dismissed the giants who were to win so many spoils for his house.

During the last few weeks Joe had been the cause of much correspondence between his father and house-master, and, had he seen Max's final letter, his astonishment would have been intense. Mrs. Rumbold, indeed, wondered how Max could so completely change his opinions in the course of a short month. But the truth was that he had never suspected that his first letter would cause such a commotion in the Rumbold household, and that, having aroused Mr. Rumbold's anger, he determined to do his best to appease it.

For Max, according to his lights, was a just man, and although he had written this letter at white-heat, and could not remember precisely what he had said about Joe, he had a very strong impression that he had committed an act of injustice.

'Full blast ahead,' was his motto, and a few small accidents on the journey were of little consequence as long as the pace was great. Still he was sometimes prepared to rectify the damage caused by his impetuosity, and in Joe's case he had certainly tried to make handsome amends.

Ignorant of Max's change of opinion, Joe had returned to Granby with a determination to win his father's approval. Just how this was to be done had not occurred to him, but he was negatively armed by a whole list of things that he must abstain from doing, and he considered that this curious equipment was better than none at all. 'Quixotic,' 'clean-cracked,' 'rotten,' had been some of the mildest epithets bestowed upon his refusal to play in the final cup-tie, and he had heard them so often that he

had almost brought himself to believe that they were correct.

At any rate, if he was eventually going to please his father, it was absolutely necessary to begin by pleasing Max, and so he went to the hall with a smile glued to his countenance. Max liked cheerful boys, and although Joe felt as if nothing but a miracle would ever make him like Max, he hoped that his smile would be accepted in the spirit in which it was meant. Furthermore, as he entered the hall, he enlarged his peace-offering until it became a grin, so anxious was he that it should not vanish before the critical moment.

'You are looking fairly pleased with yourself,' was his housemaster's greeting, and Joe shook him most warmly by the hand.

'Glad to be back?' Max asked.

'Yes, sir,' Joe answered, and continued to grin.

Whereupon Max began to wonder what this grin meant, and during the pause his eyebrows frequently twitched. Obviously, Joe thought, his peace-offering had not been accepted, so he withdrew it.

'Father and mother well?' Max jerked.

'Yes, thank you, sir,' was the reply, and Joe felt that there was a danger of his grin being replaced by a giggle. Cordiality had already departed from the interview, and Joe could neither imagine why it had gone nor how to bring it back.

'And your brothers?'

The question snapped out like a pistol-shot, and Joe visibly jumped. 'Yes, sir; but Jumpy thinks he has got "flu."'

'Tell him to take ammoniated quinine,' Max commanded and walked rapidly to the window.

For several minutes he stood with his back to Joe, and honestly fought against his irritation. He had

intended this meeting to be most amicable ; bygones were to be bygones ; the slate was to be wiped clean. But as soon as he saw Joe before him he was conscious of a feeling of antagonism. Such a feeling, he told himself, was the height of absurdity, for Joe was a Rumbold, and with the Rumbolds he had never had the smallest difficulty. Moreover, this was only a small boy who had no right to cause trouble of any kind.

Nevertheless, Max could not get away from the fact that whenever he saw Joe some vague barrier seemed to rise up between them. And this both annoyed and perplexed him, for he was as proud of the Rumbolds as they were of themselves, and his desire to see the youngest of the family bloom into a credit to the house was not entirely selfish.

‘ Why,’ Max asked himself, ‘ does this boy who is reared in a hotbed of athletics pretend not to be interested in them ? ’ for this was the charge Mr. Rumbold had brought against Joe. As he stood by the window, Max could recall the very words : ‘ By some extraordinary freak the boy does not love games, and when we talk about them he pays little or no attention. I want you to alter this state of things, for I believe in games as soundly as you do, and there is no room in our family for any more cranks like William Rumbold.’

It was fortunate that Max had turned away when he had ordered ammoniated quinine for Jumpy, because Joe could not listen to this command and not laugh at it. During the last few days nearly everyone at Maiden Croft had been pursuing Jumpy with this very remedy, until the patient had become verbally violent whenever it was mentioned.

To write and tell Jumpy what Max had said would, Joe thought, be the last straw, but the contem-

plation of his brother's fury was not diverting enough to keep him employed for more than a minute ; and long before Max had finished his meditation Joe was thinking that it would soon be advisable to cough or upset something. But while he was pondering over the best way in which to attract attention, he was seized by such a fit of sneezing that before he knew whether his latest sneeze was really going to be the last, Max was standing in front of him.

'Have *you* got "flu"?' Max asked, and Joe abandoned the hopes of another sneeze.

'No, sir. I often do that. I rather like it,' he replied.

'You seem to like curious things ; perhaps you like ammoniated quinine. To be on the safe side you had better come to my study and have a dose.'

'But, sir, I am quite well ; I feel most awfully fit,' Joe expostulated ; but Max was not to be beguiled in this way.

'Even if it doesn't do any good it won't do any harm. Come on,' he said, and led the way.

A cheerful fire was burning in the study, and after Joe had been duly dosed Max told him to sit down ; so he selected a chair that looked as if it was intended for such as he was, and wondered what was going to happen next.

'Why don't you sit in an armchair by the fire?' Max, who was looking through a book of photographs, asked ; and Joe, wondering more than ever, moved into more comfortable quarters.

But he had scarcely settled down in them before Max issued another command. 'Come here a minute ; I want to show you something,' he said.

Again Joe moved, and was given a photo of Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo to look at.

'I have seen that before, sir,' he remarked, and as

Max was evidently waiting for him to say something more, he added : ' It's rather good of Pads.'

' Both Jumpy and Pads are in their Eleven colours, and Bingo is wearing the Second Eleven cap,' Max said, with an intention that was entirely missed by Joe.

' Yes, sir,' the latter returned. ' I remember that cap of Bingo's because it is rather gaudy, and I'd made an old scarecrow and wanted something to top it up with, so I took that cap.'

' And what did Bingo say ? '

' Oh, he was most frightfully sick.'

' And don't you think he was perfectly right ? '

Joe pondered over this question for a moment. ' Yes, I suppose he was, for it was his cap,' he replied.

' But is a Granby cap the sort of thing to put on the top of a scarecrow ? '

' Not when you come to think about it like that ; but Bingo never used it, and I only thought it was just the thing that I wanted. I mean that I forgot all about Granby when I took it.'

' Caps don't seem to mean much to you,' Max remarked.

' I haven't got any,' Joe replied at once.

' And don't you want any ? You didn't seem to be very keen about them last term.'

' I've made up my mind to *want* them,' Joe said ; but the emphasis expressed a doubt whether he would ever get them.

' You are a most extraordinary boy,' Max exclaimed, and rose abruptly from his chair.

' That's what my father and Flip and Bingo say ; but I can't see why,' Joe said, and looked to Max to give an explanation.

' Aren't you fond of games ? ' Max asked him.

' Yes, I like playing them,' Joe replied.

‘Then don’t you want to succeed at them, to be better than anyone else, to be worthy of your name?’ and as Max shot out these questions he put his hand heavily on Joe’s shoulder.

‘I’ve promised to try; I mean to try,’ Joe said, and Max motioned him back to the armchair.

And while Joe sat there waiting for his housemaster to cease from marching up and down, he felt as if a web was closing round him. In the future he was to be a collector of caps, and for the life of him he could not look forward to his fate with any enthusiasm. ‘I am not cut out for a blood,’ was what he had told his mother, and most thoroughly did he believe it. Yet if he was to stay at Granby a cap collector he had got to be, and a mighty poor job did he expect to make of it.

At last, however, Max paused from his wanderings, and halting in front of the fire gazed at the top of Joe’s head.

‘Did you see the first letter I wrote to your father?’ he asked.

‘I heard some of it, but I didn’t see it,’ was the reply.

‘Do you know what I wrote afterwards?’

‘No, sir,’ Joe answered; and Max took a quick march to the door and back.

‘I think,’ he said on his return, ‘that I was unfair to you in that first letter, and I wish to tell you that I am sorry that I wrote it.’

In a discussion about masters that Joe had once listened to at Maiden Croft, he could distinctly remember his father decreeing that a master who had made a mistake must be extremely foolish ever to acknowledge it to a boy, and this parental announcement came to his mind as he stared at Max and tried to think of something to say. Apologies were things

that he was much more experienced in giving than in receiving, and for the moment he found it difficult to realize that Max had descended from the Jovian realms in which all housemasters lived. In fact, he was suffering temporarily from a mental earthquake, and was totally incapable of putting any of his jumbled thoughts into speech.

His silence, however, passed unnoticed, for Max was thorough in whatever he did, and now that he had brought himself to make one apology, he threw magisterial dignity to the winds and made a general confession of error.

To Joe, sitting agape in an armchair several sizes too large for him, this extraordinary change in the Max he had known was more than a little embarrassing. An angry Max, an energetic Max, even a cheerful Max when the house had been distinguishing itself, were all acquaintances of Joe's, and he had at least a vague idea of the way to treat them. But an apologetic Max was an entirely new experience, and Joe suffered from extreme discomfort while he was introduced to him.

For some time, indeed, he could scarcely listen to what Max was saying, so anxious was he to go away and tell Ormsby what had happened. Since his return to Granby he had only seen Ormsby for about ten minutes, but in that short time he had been told that the 'Life of Max' had been begun; and here was a magnificent chapter, if only Ormsby would believe it! Not that truth, as far as he understood Ormsby's scheme, was to be the prevailing feature of this 'Life.'

But presently Joe guessed that there was, after all, some method in what he had deemed a fit of madness, for with his sense of the fitness of things he had seriously thought that any master who could so completely

confess the error of his ways must have at least two bees in his bonnet. It was 'jolly decent of Max,' and 'a real sporting thing to do,' of this Joe was sure; but it was also colossally mad.

And then Joe discovered what it was all leading up to, and knew that the web was being drawn tighter and tighter.

'I have been too hard on you—far too hard on you,' Max was saying; 'and my disappointment that you did not at once compensate us for the loss of Bingo made me unjust. That is acknowledged, and in the future you need have no fears that it will recur. But what is one term? You have plenty of time to fulfil all the hopes we have of you, and that you can fulfil them if you care to I feel absolutely convinced. We wipe out last term—at least we will wipe out everything but the fact that you got the prize in your class, and begin afresh.'

Whereupon Max looked hard at Joe, and was pleased to see that he was smiling. The barrier between them was, he thought, broken down; but he did not suspect that it was a mere after-thought of his that had broken it, nor did it occur to him that barriers can be as easily repaired as removed. If he had not by chance mentioned Joe's prize, the result of his efforts would have been incomparably smaller than it was. But as soon as it had been admitted that the last term had not been totally blank, Joe's spirits rose tumultuously, and when that happened his candour was apt to be disconcerting.

'I've made a much bigger mistake than you, sir,' he blurted, 'for I really thought you didn't care what happened to me in my class. I must have been a most fearful ass.'

This last statement Max was by no means disposed to deny. Tact was not a quality he ever professed

to covet for himself, but under certain conditions he was disposed to deplore the general lack of it, and on this occasion he was so embarrassed by Joe's frankness that he could only reply to it with a succession of 'Tuts!'

'It was frightfully stupid of me; I thought I had better tell you,' Joe added, and rose from his comfortable chair, because Max looked as if he was waiting for him to go.

'You must get rid of these absurd ideas, and then we shall get on famously,' Max said.

'I see that they were all wrong,' Joe acknowledged, and quietly left the room as Max began to pace up and down it.

But although Joe was aware that the friendliness of this interview had waned towards the end, he departed from it with far greater confidence in Max than he had ever had.

'I'll simply buck up like anything,' he said to himself, and when he met Cole in the passage he greeted him with a most cheerful smile.

'Anybody might think you are glad to see me again; I'm not your long-lost brother from Timbuctoo,' Cole said.

But the coldest of douches was powerless to suppress Joe at that moment.

'Oh, rot!' he returned. 'I vote we stow feuds and try to forget all about them.'

'I've sometimes felt like that at the beginning of the term when I've got plenty of money, but it doesn't last,' Cole replied, and walked away.

* * * * *

On the next morning Joe found that he had not been given a double remove, and that seven of his former class—among whom was Ormsby—had been pro-

moted to a form that was taken by a man whose name, to his perpetual sorrow, was Ussher.

It was soon evident to all of the promoted boys that the change from Mr. Ridley to Mr. Ussher was not for the better, and Ormsby, before a week had passed, flatly declared that their new class-master was not even worth fighting.

'You could have a decent stand-up row with Ridley,' he said, 'and you knew he'd fight fair; but this man sneaks into the room as if we were a pack of invalids who will all kick the bucket if he makes the least noise. He's always trying to catch us doing something for which he can jump on us, and the best way of scoring off him is not to give him the chance.'

And with this Joe was ready enough to agree, for Mr. Ussher suffered from a profound distrust in the honesty of boys, and hunted for 'cribbers' with an unwearying zeal. Of sympathy between the master and his class there was absolutely none; boys worked for Mr. Ussher solely because they were anxious to get away from him.

Upon Joe he had a deadening influence; school-work became the dullest of grinds; the atmosphere of the class-room was vitiated by suspicion; and when Joe handed up an especially good piece of prose, Mr. Ussher unblushingly asked him if he had been helped with it.

To get away from such a distrustful man for occasional hours was a huge relief, and Joe began to treat visits to the master who taught him mathematics as if they were delightful excursions. Previously he had been bored by the sight of an equation; for he was not a mathematician, and knew that he never could be. But there was a sort of hail-fellow-well-metness about Mr. Ashworth that was exceedingly pleasant after an undiluted dose of Mr. Ussher,

and a buffet when he slacked was infinitely more to Joe's liking than being compelled to listen to Mr. Ussher's elaborate sarcasms. And when Joe compared the one man with the other, he remembered that Mr. Ashworth was a 'blue,' and highly recommended by Bingo, while Mr. Ussher's best friend could hardly help calling him a smug.

Thus, with his interest in his work paralyzed by a man who treated boys as slaves and himself as their driver, Joe found it easy to turn his thoughts into other directions. For a fortnight he played 'scrum' half-back in the Second House Fifteen with a zest that gained Rose's enthusiastic approval.

'You'll break your neck to a dead certainty,' Ormsby kept on telling him, 'you fling yourself simply anyhow on the ball.'

But Joe did not mind. Falling on the ball was his strong point, for he was far from clever at passing it, and the fact that he was covered with such bruises that fellows at the baths clustered round to have a look at them was only an encouraging proof that he was grimly trying to win a cap.

And then, just as Ormsby was beginning to think that Joe was no longer in danger of not making the most of himself, a great frost began, and went on uninterruptedly for nearly five weeks. With the ground frozen as hard as iron Max had reluctantly to admit the impossibility of playing footer, and Ormsby, who was craving for employment of some kind, complained loquaciously when Arkwright, who was to have returned to Granby at the beginning of February, wrote that he was not coming back until the next term.

'Now we can't play footer, we've got plenty of time to finish off his education,' he said; 'and the worst of it is that I believe he's jolly glad not to come

back. He'll turn up next term in mittens and a chest-protector, and we shall have to begin all over again'; and then he went on to declare that unless something happened soon, he should go out and assault a policeman.

'Let's go and do voluntary "gym,"' Joe suggested.

'Snakes alive! that's a good idea. The frost is making you Rumboldish; you're getting most fearfully keen.'

'Oh, shut up!' Joe said, and as they went up to the 'gym' they decided that Battersby would be furious when they told him what they had been doing.

But in the 'gym' they found Battersby solemnly amusing himself with dumb-bells.

CHAPTER II

MAX *VERSUS* PALMER

FOR two or three days Max was so indignant with the frost that the only notice he took of it was to assert repeatedly that it would not last. But when the newspapers began to chronicle marvellous readings of the thermometer, and when (to Max's infinite disgust) the skating championship was actually decided on the Fens, he gave up prophesying and summoned Palmer to discuss the deplorable state of affairs.

'There is no depending upon the weather,' he began, when Palmer, looking even more bovine and placid than usual, arrived in his study; 'so the thing to do is to see that everyone in the house gets plenty of sound exercise.'

He spoke with some asperity, but without producing the smallest effect. For Palmer considered that the weather was entirely to be depended upon, and additionally had a secret hope (which he was too wise to disclose) that the frost would continue for weeks. If Max's advice meant anything it most assuredly meant 'Runs,' and from the very bottom of his heart Palmer hated to jog drearily along a frozen road. Moreover, the prefects had just been invited to skate on a lake close to Granby, and not for all the challenge cups in the school did Palmer intend to run when he had the chance to skate.

'The slightest slackness, and we may miss the Second

Fifteen cup,' Max continued ; ' for the Bonhamites are quite a useful lot.' And this reference to the Bonhamites moved Palmer to speak.

' They kept back two or three fellows, who ought to have been in their First Fifteen, so that they might get the cup this term. I call that a low-down game,' he said.

' Then there is all the more reason why they should be beaten,' Max immediately replied, and proceeded strongly to recommend a long and daily run for the whole house. In his enthusiasm he mentioned Stourford and Durdington as excellent places to run to ; but what Palmer remembered about these villages was that they were respectively six and seven miles from Granby, and the mere thought of toiling to and from them compelled him to take his eyeglasses from his pocket, and to wipe them carefully.

This trick, which was a favourite one of his when he wished to avoid speaking, invariably annoyed Max ; but on this occasion he only allowed himself a muffled grunt of impatience. Nevertheless, he could not help regretting that the present head of his house had not inherited some of Bingo's initiative and activity. On the football-field Palmer was a figure of terror to his opponents, he rolled them over with the strength of a young bull and the quickness of a hound, but off it he frequently reminded Max of some prehistoric animal which found the acme of content in prolonged siestas.

To prevent Palmer from sinking into a state of somnolent satisfaction had become one of Max's regular duties, and frequently he sent for him and gave him a brief but stirring address. His address was now less brief and more stirring than usual, but long before the end of it Palmer's mind was wholly occupied by a desire to sit down.

‘Some of us have been asked to skate on the lake at Dale Court. I’m very keen on skating,’ he said, and having at last fixed his eyeglasses on his nose he looked blinkingly out of the window.

‘But surely,’ Max retorted at once, ‘your first duty is to the house ; you ought not to require to be reminded of that.’

At this Palmer turned his massive head from the window, and a smile dawned and slowly spread over his face.

‘I don’t get much chance of forgetting it, do I, sir?’ he said ; and this unexpected question sent Max sprinting round the room.

To quarrel vulgarly with a boy of Palmer’s standing was contrary to the fitness of things as Max understood it. A school prefect might be advised, exhorted, stimulated, even—in some cases—rebuked ; but since Max considered that a boy’s character was as easy to read as the daily newspaper, it followed that in his opinion the head of his house must possess exceptional merits.

From the boys who were being trained under the Maxine system, the Head of the house was chosen because he was the most perfect specimen of his time. There were, Max with some reluctance admitted, degrees of perfection. Bingo, for instance, had been superlatively successful in bringing glory to the house that he led ; Pads, in spite of being irritatingly casual, had never given Max a moment of real uneasiness ; Trower, Vane, Ransome, Milton, had all done their work thoroughly and well. None of them had given him cause to doubt the wisdom of his choice. They had responded to the claims he had made upon them, and they had been almost slavishly devoted to the system.

And now Palmer, with his stultifying silence and

unlooked-for lapse into something very like disrespect, made Max wonder whether he could possibly have made a mistake. The mantle had fallen upon Palmer because of his supposed level-headedness and his undoubted brilliancy as a football player. That this level-headedness might develop into obstinacy had never occurred to Max, and now, while he sped up and down the room, he had to fight against a strong desire to treat his senior prefect as if he was a youngster of Joe's standing in the house.

Such treatment, however, was quite contrary to precedent ; furthermore, to put it into practice would be an admission that Palmer's selection had been an error of judgment. Under ordinary circumstances Max was ready enough to admit that he might make a mistake ; he had even been known to boast that he did not aspire to the infallibility which some of his colleagues seemed to claim for themselves. But this admission of error referred only to minor affairs and to junior boys ; when it came to the selection of a head for his house, Max thought—with some reason—that his judgment was nothing more nor less than marvellous.

So when he eventually ceased from perambulating the room he had subdued most of his irritability, and had determined to treat Palmer with great firmness and kindness.

All doubts as to the boy who was going to accompany this daily run were to be swept away before Palmer left the study, and Max was confident that the process of sweeping would be most satisfactorily completed in a very few minutes.

But before the short time that he had deemed sufficient for this task was completed, he found himself engaged in a struggle that made him almost incoherent with astonishment. A battle royal at once

began. Will clashed against will, and Max's verbosity was battered and beaten by his opponent's colossal determination to skate whenever he got the chance.

'It's the one thing I am tremendously keen on,' Palmer said. 'You know I've been in Switzerland the last two Christmas holidays, and I would rather skate than do anything.'

'Rather than do your duty?' Max asked.

'Anyone can see fifteen fellows run along a road; for that matter they could do it by themselves.'

'I want the whole house to go for runs.'

'Then, sir, there will be all the more to see that the others really do it.'

If Palmer's meaning was a little involved it was impossible to doubt the determination of the tone in which he spoke, and a more tactful and less honest man than Max might have waived the dispute as a matter which was, after all, but of small importance. Such a course, however, would at the best have been an acknowledgment of defeat, and Max required most convincing evidence before he could admit that he was beaten. So he stolidly stuck to his guns, and in the combat used all the powers of persuasion that he possessed.

To this torrent of language Palmer listened with inexhaustible patience and a totally unmoved countenance. What all the fuss was about he scarcely understood, and did not in the least care. If Max liked suddenly to go mad and to extract trouble out of a trifle, it was not, Palmer thought, any concern of his. Nor was it going to prevent him from skating. He was simply incapable of understanding that Max was bent on having his way in the matter, because, for the first time in his life, he found himself in direct opposition to the boy of his own choosing.

'A certain slackness,' Max said, 'is bound to creep into the house if the Head of it hands over his authority to someone else, and merely goes off and enjoys himself.'

'If you are dissatisfied with me I am quite ready for someone else to take my place,' Palmer, quite unperturbed and unruffled, replied.

'My dear boy, don't talk like a fool. We don't do things like that in this house. We practise a little give-and-take.'

'It's all give and no take in this case,' Palmer remarked, and Max promptly told him that he was exceedingly discourteous.

'I didn't mean to be, sir. I said it because it seemed to be true,' Palmer explained.

'It is not true,' Max said emphatically; but this statement only induced Palmer to take his spectacles from his pocket. After an assiduous wiping, he removed his eyeglasses and put on his spectacles. Then, while Max fidgeted round the room, he pushed his spectacles on to his forehead, and again placed the eyeglasses on his nose. This performance of his was unusual but not unique, and he only sought refuge in it when he was either extremely hard at work or bored. On this occasion he was bored.

'Would you mind telling me what you *do* mean?' Max stopped in front of him and asked.

'I mean to skate. It's mad to miss such a chance,' was the reply.

'This is not the time to discuss insanity,' Max snapped back.

Palmer passed a hand over his forehead, encountered the spectacles, and having put them back into his pocket, said, with more animation than he had previously shown: 'Rather not.'

'I am glad that you are at last able to agree with

me,' Max said angrily ; but the only effect this produced upon Palmer was to make him blink.

' I do not think that there is any necessity for me to keep you any longer,' Max announced ; but just as Palmer was turning slowly towards the door, he added : ' When, however, you consider what I have said, I think that you will see that your plain duty is to superintend these runs yourself.'

Palmer at once halted to ponder over this valedictory remark. It was, he thought, one of those horrible things that Max rattled off with surprising ease, but to which as a rule it was unnecessary to pay any attention. Now, however, he was sufficiently interested to pause while he considered Max's meaning, and, having grasped it, he stood with his fingers on the handle of the door and issued what was really an ultimatum.

' I have told you, sir,' he said, ' that someone shall look after these runs, and if you tell me to look after them, I don't see why I shouldn't be able to put the job on to someone else. Everybody who doesn't skate shall run, and whether I run or not doesn't make any difference as far as I can see.'

' You cannot help being short-sighted,' Max returned ; and Palmer, ignoring that remark, left the field of battle.

But, as he returned to his own side of the house, he was nearly as angry at this sneer as Max was with himself for having used such an unfair weapon. If any proof was wanted to show who was victor in the fight, Max's final remark was more than enough. He was temporarily beaten, and he knew that he was ; but even at the moment when his personal esteem had suffered a severe blow and his opinion of the perfection of his system had received a severer one, he was ashamed of himself for hitting below the belt.

Max was a born fighter, and during his pugnacious career he had seldom been compelled to admit defeat ; but he could not have imposed his will upon his boys and broken them in so successfully to his system if they had ever suspected him of meanness. His faults were, in fact, largely those of impulse ; he never laid traps to catch boys, and so they found it easy to forgive him when he stormed over trifles or punished them for things they had not done. At first they were scared by him, as Joe was scared ; but his keenness and straightforwardness generally carried him through in the end, and if they never really understood him, they liked him well enough to smile at his eccentricities—after they had left Granby.

Possibly Joe would have fallen more readily under his influence if he had not been forced to endure a special course of treatment, for he was, as he expressed it, ' often simply fed up with the man ' ; but although he felt that to get on with his housemaster must always require a special effort on his part, the majority of the boys in the house were content with Max, and not a little proud of him.

For the first time since Max had taken over the house did his senior prefect quite seriously think of him as a bounder, but, fortunately, he was a boy who cared nothing for the pleasure of communicating surprising news ; and though he felt that he had at last discovered what Max really was, he kept the discovery to himself when he walked into Rose's room. Nevertheless, he was not in his usual state of placidity, and for some inexplicable reason the sight of Rose gloating over a pair of new skates increased his annoyance.

Now it happened that Rose could skate far better than he could do anything else, and by no one had

the frost been welcomed with more delight than by him ; for at last his chance, he thought, had come to show off before some of the fellows who had persistently declined his offers of friendship. He still had to hang on to ' The Line ' as best he could, and considering that in a few short weeks he had received more snubs than most people have to endure in a lifetime, it is small wonder that he rejoiced to think that his hour of triumph was at hand.

' Aren't they ripping ? ' he asked, and held up the skates for inspection.

' Yes, they're all right,' Palmer replied, as he looked at them ; and when he had finished his examination he added : ' But I don't see what use they are to you.'

' Ah ! that's what I'm going to tell you,' Rose said, with a chuckle ; ' for when I heard that old Bristow had invited the school prefects to skate on his lake, I hired a " bike " and went to see him.'

Clearly he expected to be praised for his promptness, and he looked both surprised and disgusted when Palmer merely grunted : ' What confounded impudence ! '

' At any rate I'm a house prefect,' he said.

' And so are nearly every Dick, Tom, and Harry in the place. Bristow's lake isn't as big as Loch Lomond,' Palmer returned, with his eyes glued upon the skates.

' Well, there's always room for a small one, and I shan't make much difference,' Rose replied in a tone that was intended to be conciliatory.

' You won't make *any*,' Palmer said at once.

' But you can't want the whole of that lake for yourself and about twenty other fellows.'

' No, but I want you to take the Second Fifteen out for a run every day. I put you in charge of them,

and you ought to feel proud,' Palmer announced deliberately, and as he spoke he picked up the skates.

Rose, however, knew several reasons why he was a most unsuitable fellow to superintend these runs, but not one of them made the smallest appeal to Palmer.

'They had better start at half-past two this afternoon, and as it's a half they can go a good long way. But don't hurry them at first; just keep them moving,' he said.

'Can I take one of the house-whips?' Rose asked.

'Yes, but don't go slashing at them. If I find that you just let out right and left, you won't have a whip,' Palmer replied, and with the skates in his hand he moved towards the door.

'Here, you are walking off with my skates,' Rose shouted.

Then Palmer turned slowly round. 'A new pair of skates are like a new pair of boots—they want using a bit before they're comfortable. I'll break them in for you,' he said, and went back to his room with the skates, and also with the pleasant feeling of having astonished Rose.

For Rose had felt so certain that he could twist Palmer round his fingers that at the beginning of this term he had said as much to a Bonhamite, and the Bonhamite had told Temperley, and Temperley had told Armitage, who had asked Palmer what he thought about it. At the time Palmer had apparently thought nothing, for he made no comment whatever upon Armitage's information; nevertheless, he had made up his mind that Rose must be put back into his proper place. And for the time being his proper place, in Palmer's opinion, was a hard and dreary road.

Left skateless and alone, Rose was inclined for a

moment to persuade himself that Palmer's sudden display of unfriendliness was a joke—a bad joke (such as might be expected from a simpleton trying to be humorous), but still a joke. After very brief reflection, however, he dismissed this idea, and began to think abusively of the fellow who had stalked into his room and taken his skates. 'Great hulking brigand,' was the first description he found for him, and it pleased him so much that he immediately forgot the unpleasant part of Palmer's visit, and only remembered that he was now in charge of the Second Fifteen, with power to use a whip upon the lagging and short-winded.

During the days that followed, Palmer, Armitage, and West skated frequently on Mr. Bristow's lake, and mightily enjoyed themselves. But for the remainder of the house a daily run was anything but a welcome form of exercise. Every morning or afternoon two squads of boys set out to run for several miles, but the squad that was being trained by Rose ran faster and farther than the one which a boy called Cameron was supposed to command.

After a week of this unthrilling form of exercise, heavy snow fell in the night, and subsequently Cameron and his companions ran barely two miles, and then spent the remainder of their time in tobogganing on Cranley Hill. But for the Second Fifteen there was no change from the dull monotony of these weary runs, though, in a sense, Ormsby and Joe managed to extract a flicker of amusement from them.

For Ormsby quickly found out that he was marked down to receive Rose's attentions, while Joe was to be spared them; so, after he and Joe had warmed themselves by running at a good pace, they always fell behind the rest of the squad for the sole purpose of tantalizing the whipper-in. On these occasions

Ormsby kept just in front of Joe, and it was impossible for Rose to use his whip on the one without touching the other. It is true that such a simple game sometimes bored Ormsby so much that he had to vary it by jumping suddenly to one side, but when Rose swallowed this bait he generally found that his prey was too quick for him.

Thus the only pleasure Rose ever hoped to get from these runs was taken away by Joe's determination to run immediately in front of him, and more than once he felt vehemently inclined to risk the chance of offending Bingo and to deal lashingly with Joe. And if he had yielded to this inclination it is quite certain that Bingo would have been far from displeased, while he would have prevented Joe from despising him for putting up with such an obvious piece of cheek.

But there was a kink in Rose's nature that stopped him from behaving like a normal boy. Plots, stratagems, and wiles were dear to him; discretion, in his opinion, was not only the greater part, but almost the sole part, of valour.

Thus Joe ran scathless, although perpetually raging against the fellow who refused to treat him as he deserved, and the game was becoming intensely wearisome when, by mere accident, something happened to relieve its tediousness.

Heavy snow had fallen again, but it made little difference to the skaters for whom Mr. Bristow catered with the prodigality of a millionaire, and it suited the tobogganing contingent excellently well. But it made Rose wish that he had never been born, and similar impossibilities. His patience, in fact, was giving way, and as Joe and Ormsby ran doggedly in front of him on the dismal road to Durdington, a chance of using his whip suddenly presented itself.

The squad was approaching a wind-swept corner, where the road turned abruptly to the right, and as usual Cole was stolidly plodding on, a perfect example of grim determination. And then, just before he turned the corner, one of his shoes came off, and he bent down to recover it. Nearly all of the runners paid no attention to Cole, and disappeared round the bend ; but Joe and Ormsby waited at the corner to see what would happen, and witnessed a sight that made them chuckle all the way to Durdington.

‘ Why can’t you wear decent shoes ? ’ Rose asked ; but Cole was too much engaged in tying up a lace that had broken to answer such a question.

‘ Hurry up,’ Rose continued ; ‘ you’ve chosen the windiest place on earth for your shoe to come off.’

‘ Do you think I did it on purpose ? ’ Cole growled.

‘ I don’t care why you did it, but if you don’t hurry up I’ll give you something to make you remember it.’

‘ What’s that ? ’ Cole asked.

‘ A taste of this whip.’

And at this answer Cole laughed so provokingly that it did not altogether astonish Joe and Ormsby when they saw Rose carry out his threat. For a moment Cole stopped bending over his shoe, and looked as if he was going to reply to this attack there and then ; but directly afterwards he bent down again and finished mending his lace. And while he was engaged in this, Rose, seeing Ormsby some yards away from Joe, ran forward, and left Cole to follow.

In a second Ormsby was back in his usual position, but before they had run twenty yards Cole had caught up Rose, and with something between a heave and a push had sent him head first into a deep snow-drift on the side of the road.

‘ If he stays there it will be a thundering good rid-

dance of rotten rubbish,' Cole grunted, and started up the road to Durdington.

'Well, I'm blowed!' Joe exclaimed, and, putting his hands on his knees, he began to shake with laughter.

'He's gone clean through all the soft snow. Do you think he'll ever get out?' Ormsby asked.

'You bet he will; but I vote we wait to see him.'

'He'll be in a most awful bait; he's beginning to move. Let's hook it.'

'Cole buzzed him in as if he was a baby,' Joe said, and again succumbed to hopeless laughter.

'I'm off. That whip stings, and my legs are cold,' Ormsby replied, and walked slowly up the road.

But Joe was so anxious to see what Rose looked like when he reappeared that he could not tear himself away.

'He's fairly on the move. You'd better come on,' Ormsby called out; but Joe refused to budge.

And when at last Rose did manage to struggle out of the drift he was worth looking at. The most realistic Father Christmas ever contrived would have looked spring-like beside him. Snow, softened by the morning's sun, was clinging to every bit of him; it was on his face, hair, arms, legs. His ears and mouth were full of it, and he came out in such a spluttering and wheezing condition that Joe's first impulse was to go and help him.

'Come on,' Ormsby shouted again, and nipped that impulse in the bud.

But Joe stayed until Rose began to shake himself, and then he ran off and joined Ormsby.

'We'd better catch the others up,' the latter said.

'What's the hurry?' Joe asked him.

'If you'd ever felt that whip, you'd know. He'll simply use it on the first fellow he sees.'

'I am not keen on the whip, but it's about my turn,' Joe said.

'Don't be such a silly ass,' Ormsby replied; and they did not speak again until they had run some distance on the twisting road and found Cole waiting for them.

'Where's Rose?' he asked.

'I expect he's still combing his hair,' Ormsby said.

'He's got snow down his throat and up his nose, and was absolutely stuffed with it,' Joe added.

'Serve him jolly well right. Do you think he'll come on?' Cole said.

'I never thought of that. I shouldn't wonder if he goes home and waits for you,' Ormsby answered.

'Let him wait; I'm not afraid of him,' Cole said; but, as he turned once more towards Durdington, he added, 'no one else saw what happened, so keep your mouths shut; it's no good jawing about it.'

When they reached Durdington they found Battersby and the rest of the fifteen waiting for them and their whipper-in. But nothing more was seen of Rose during that afternoon.

CHAPTER III

FROST AND FLOOD

IN the middle of the nineteenth century villagers in the neighbourhood of Durdington had spoken of it as 'town.' 'Be yer goin' to town Saturday night?' 'Yes, I be.' And to 'town' men, women, youths, and maidens who had been toiling during the week on the land, flocked for their few hours of relaxation. In those days Durdington prospered and gave itself airs, and then a railway was built, which, in spite of protests, left the 'town' scornfully on one side.

Irretrievable as this misfortune was, Durdington might have accepted it with greater resignation had not its loss been Glyde's gain. Durdington and Glyde had always been rivals, but after the one had obtained the railway that had been denied the other, rivalry developed into fierce and active antagonism.

Some thirty years before Rose was bundled neck and crop into a snowdrift the young braves of Durdington had walked five miles over the hills, and having given fair notice of their coming had met and routed the champions of Glyde in hand-to-hand and bare-knuckled combat. If they had stopped at that and returned home they would have been well advised, but success went wildly to their heads, and their next move was to attack and wreck the railway-station.

So much of the story Joe had already heard from

Benjamin, Max's boot-boy, who was a native of Durdington, and also in constant danger of returning abruptly to the place from which he had come. The tale had such great attractions for Joe that he never saw the boot-boy without cross-examining him about it; but either because he did not consider that the rest of the story reflected credit upon Durdington, or because he really did not know it, Benjamin could be coerced into nothing more than the vainest repetitions.

Nevertheless, the little that Joe knew of the details of that great night seemed to deprive Durdington of some of its melancholy, and to invest it with a spirit of romance. What was to the rest of the runners merely a desolate village in which houses, with their windows broken, stood waiting for the occupants who never came and where grass grew thick between the paving-stones of High Street, was to Joe a source of endless speculation. Not even to Ormsby did he confide how eagerly he wanted to hear an account of that fight from one of the combatants, for he felt certain that Ormsby would merely tell him not to be an ass. Ormsby lived entirely in the present or in the future. He was eager enough to make history if he ever got the chance; but he was not at all anxious to read or hear about it. The past that called so loudly to Joe meant very little or nothing to him. He was 'out' to do things himself; he did not want to remember what other people had done.

So when the squad stood in the market-place, where nothing was any longer bought or sold, and stared across at the Assembly Room, in which only rats assembled, Ormsby was suddenly fired with one of his ideas, and whispered to Joe:

'I think I've got a scheme. Just stay for me if they start before I come back.'

Without waiting for an answer he walked quickly out of the market-place, and immediately after he had disappeared Battersby suggested that Rose was probably lying in the snow with a sprained ankle, and expecting them to carry him home on a hurdle. To this Cole replied with a guffawish grunt that made Battersby ask him if he was ill. Then Cole answered that he wasn't ill yet, but that he soon would be if he had to listen to such rot. Whereupon Joe began to giggle, and was promptly told that he and Cole were selected as two of the hurdle-carriers.

‘I'll carry Rose home on my back if you'll find him,’ Cole retorted; and then all of the squad, with the exception of Ormsby and Joe, straggled slowly out of Durdington.

Left to himself, Joe vaguely wondered how long he should have to wait for Ormsby; but when the latter was bent upon one of his schemes the outcome was invariably trouble, and Joe had become philosophical enough not to be anxious until he was face to face with the results of it. No one was in sight except a wooden-legged man, who was standing against the battered walls of the Assembly Room, and Joe stared across the market-place at him, and decided to go and find out if he could supply the missing part of Benjamin's story.

‘I've seen you afore,’ the man said, as Joe went up to him; ‘and what strikes me dumb is why the whole lot of you come panting your breath out in this dead-alive place two or three times a week.’

‘We're training.’

‘Playing at being 'orses,’ he said; and Joe began to think that his companion was the village idiot.

But just as he was turning round to look for some more hopeful way of beguiling the time, he was asked to give his name.

‘Joe Rumbold,’ he replied.

‘I never ’eard tell of such a name as that. Did you ever ’ear tell of Tom Flood afore?’

Joe shook his head.

‘Such,’ said Tom with a grin, ‘is fame.’

Joe hesitated for a few seconds, and then decided to forget his manners.

‘Did you by any chance,’ he asked, ‘lose your leg in a fight?’

‘If you wants to know, I lost un in a little poaching affair; the *Granby ’Erald* called it a Naffray,’ Mr. Flood shouted; and with an almost imbecile leer he added, ‘I cut the paragrafe out of the *’Erald*, and keep ’im locked up in my joowel-case at ’ome.’

But Joe was in search of a hero, and not of any kind of a humorist, so he looked round to see if Ormsby was yet in sight, and said carelessly: ‘Then you weren’t at the fight between Durdington and Glyde?’

Before, however, the words were out of his mouth Flood once more riveted the whole of his attention. At first Joe was afraid that he was being attacked by a hopeless madman, for Tom had clutched him firmly by the shoulder, and seemed to be in a chaotic state of splutter and spleen. Shaking Joe to and fro, he poured torrents of incoherent and violent language over him, until he abruptly released his hold and fell back exhausted against the wall.

Then Joe stood and gazed at him in undisguised amazement; the anger of the man and his extraordinary collapse were equally unintelligible until the reason of this outburst suddenly occurred to him.

‘I am most awfully sorry; you *were* at that fight, after all; I’ll bet you were. I want to hear about it most awfully. I’m awfully keen—I am, really. Do just pull yourself together and tell me. I’ve heard the first part from Benjamin——’

'Benjamin Biles,' Mr. Flood interrupted, with scorn; ''e's turnip-'eaded.'

'I know he is. Will you tell me about it?'

'Ow much d'you know already?'

Joe told him.

And while Mr. Flood listened, with occasional nods of approval and occasional signs of dissent, he seemed to Joe to grow visibly bigger. 'He looked all slack and sort of rotten at first,' Joe afterwards told Ormsby, 'and what I said seemed to pump him up.'

As a matter of fact the memories of that great night, on which Durdington had been compelled to live through dreary years, refreshed the spirit of youth in Mr. Flood. As he listened, he became once more the hero who had organized that famous (or infamous) raid, and who had known the triumphant discomfort of being carried shoulder-high from one end of Durdington to the other. No longer a wooden-legged loafer, he squared his shoulders, clenched his fists and sparred against imaginary opponents.

'I'll say this,' he announced, when Joe had finished and was waiting eagerly for him to continue the story, 'that considering Benjamin is a pudding-'ead 'imself, and born of pudding-'eaded folk, 'e's done, in a manner of speaking, pretty fairish—pretty fairish. What the stupid young toad never told you is that Tom Flood—he tapped his chest—'was the leader of that hexpedition, 'is brain planned it, 'is 'and wrote the letter telling them Glyders as we was coming, and 'e wrote the war-song we sang as we marched over the 'ills.'

'What was the song?'

'I don't rightly remember un,' Tom said, and scratched his head; 'but it went summut like this:

“ Marching, marching, marching on to Glyde,
Fists our only weapons as we onward stride ;
Now they've got the railway,
Soon they'll have a fright—
Twenty boys of Durdington
Will give 'em beans to-night.”

There are some more verses, but what with one thing and another they'e gone clean out of my 'ead,' he added.

‘ Never mind,’ Joe answered him, with an eagerness that was scarcely polite. ‘ What did you do when you got there ? ’

‘ We just 'ammered 'em until they weren't worth 'itting ; they were as soft as a lot of apple-dumplings, poor critters, made of dough.’

‘ And then ? ’

‘ Why then, so to say, we began to show 'em what's what. We'd chosen a moonlight night in May month, 'aving nothing to be ashamed of as we could see. They'd be using their long tongues on us, and we paid 'em back in 'ard fists. No 'anky-panky ; all fair and habove board ; no quarter asked for or given, as the saying is. And when we'd finished 'em off we went and made a sight of a mess of their railway-station as they were so proud of—just broke it up a bit, so that the engine-driver of their one passenger train—'e was born in Durdington—might ask them a question or two in the morning.’

‘ And was that all ? ’

‘ All ! ’ Mr. Flood shouted scornfully. ‘ I should think it wasn't. Let me tell you, young fellow, that when you begins that game it's like drink—the more you goes on, the more you wants. I *know* ! ’ and Joe found no reason to contradict him.

‘ What we did next,’ he continued when he had recovered his breath, ‘ was to march in lines of four through Glyde singing our song, and then it came into

my 'ead 'ow we'd put a top on the evening. I'd caught sight of some rope in the station, and a few Glyders were still nosing about whispering that we ought to be locked up, and where was the police, and those sort of yarns. So back to the station we marched, took our rope, and cut un up into sizeable pieces, and got to work'; and the remembrance of that work made Mr. Flood laugh and cough alternately until Joe lost patience with him.

'Do go on,' he said; 'I want to hear what happened.'

'Don't you be in such a mortal 'urry, young whipper-snapper, or I'll catch you a clout over the ear-'ole. You've never led a Foray—that's what the beaks on the Bench called it. It isn't everyone who's been in a Foray and a Naffray,' Tom shouted.

'By Jove! no,' Joe said, and succeeded in appeasing Mr. Flood.

'You seem to know a man when you clap eyes on un.'

'Rather.'

'Well, just bear this in mind then. Glyde had four lamps, posts and all, as they was as preeny about as ever they was of their little 'ole of a station. Glyde, they said, was to be the new 'ealth resort, so we reckoned we'd give the 'ealth-resorters sommut to talk about when they resorted, which they never did do; folks being born fools, but not such blithering born fools as that. First we got 'old of the station-master—a fat bulk of a man, as himportant as a hen with one chick, and in 'is brand-new uniform and all—and we tied 'im up tight to the lamp-post nearest the station, which was, in a manner of speaking, kind of us. And we left four fellows to guard 'im and listen to what 'e said, and 'e said a lot. Then we laid 'ands on the porter, who ran like a nare, a

poor squirm of a fellow, but in the natooral order of things 'e 'ad to come next to 'is boss. Afterwards we tied up the policeman, who tried to make believe 'e liked it ; and for the last post we chose Bert Gibbs, by trade a chemist and by nature a liar, who'd been braggarting that 'e was going to be the first Mayor of Glyde. All in a row we got 'em tied tight, and when we'd sung 'em our song a time or two, and there wasn't no one left about, for they'd all run like rabbits and bolted their doors, we just marched off 'ome and went to bed.'

The ending Joe thought disappointing, but before he could speak Mr. Flood added : ' What I should like to draw your hattention to is that we never went hinside a public-'ouse, 'aving no quarrels with publicans.'

' What happened afterwards ? '

' I got fourteen days 'ard. Some of 'em were fined, which was paid by public subscription, and I was a nero for about a month.'

' Then you ought to have burnt Glyde,' Ormsby said over Joe's shoulder, and was promptly asked how long he had been present.

' I came when he was calling you a " whipper-snapper." '

' What's that 'e said about burning Glyde, as if I didn't know my own business ? ' Mr. Flood asked furiously.

' He meant it for a joke,' Joe explained.

' Then 'e'd best be careful 'oo 'e jokes with, for Tom Flood ain't one as stands any sauce, not even now 'e isn't ; but 'e wouldn't object to being stood a drink if heither of you 'as the price of one in your pockets.'

Whereupon Joe pulled Ormsby to one side for a hurried consultation.

'I've only got ninepence, and that's at home,' he said.

'I put all my money in my pockets because I had a sort of feeling I might want it; but this is all I have left,' Ormsby answered, and handed over a threepenny-bit, two pennies, and three halfpennies.

'It's a queer-looking lot; still, it will have to do,' Joe said; but although Mr. Flood looked at it with some scorn, he did not refuse it—indeed, without wasting a moment, he stumped off in the direction of the Wheatsheaf, and took no notice of the 'good-bye' Joe fired after him.

'I've been the very dickens of a time,' Ormsby said. 'We shall have to run like blazes, or we shall be late for lock-up.'

'What have you been doing?'

'Showing the Durdington carpenter how to make bob-sleighs. We'll toboggan to-morrow; it's an extra half.'

'How about Rose?'

'He's a back number—dead as a blooming door-nail. He doesn't count any more,' Ormsby replied, and then he started to run.

If they were to be back at the house in time for lock-up, they had to travel nearly seven miles on a snowy road in an hour and a quarter, and before they had gone a seventh of the distance Ormsby was panting loudly, and saying that they had not got a dog's chance. But Joe, to his surprise, discovered that he was enjoying this struggle against time, and began to think that he must have 'a wind' if he could feel quite fresh, while Ormsby was blowing like a grampus. And a long wind would be extraordinarily useful if he was ever to become a real pot-winning, cap-getting Rumbold.

When they reached a sign-post, which directed

them to Granby and told them that they had to go five and a half miles before they got there, Ormsby embraced the post as if it was a long-lost and much-loved friend, and clung to it with his head down.

'I'm done to the world,' he panted, after Joe had stood disconsolately watching him for two or three minutes.

'You'll be as right as rain now,' Joe replied; but he was a little annoyed with him, for a boy with no breath always arouses more scorn than sympathy in one who has plenty.

'You'd better go on and leave me to walk. I've about seventeen stitches in my side, and I feel as if I might be sick at any minute.'

This combination was too much for Joe to deal with, but he had no intention whatever of leaving his afflicted companion.

'We'd better walk a bit until your stitch goes,' he said.

'I've got more than one stitch; I'm simply all stitches,' Ormsby replied; but his affection for the post seemed to be decreasing. 'Where the dickens you get your wind from beats me; we've been sprinting all the way,' he added.

There was no time to waste either in explanations or denials, for, unless they sprinted faster than ever, Joe knew that they were bound to be late.

'Come on; try walking,' he said.

Whereupon Ormsby abandoned the post, and with his hand pressed to his side began senilely to hobble.

'It's no use,' he declared, after they were about fifty yards nearer to Granby. 'I'm going to have either jaundice, glanders, or appendicitis—perhaps all three.'

'Oh, buck up! You'll get your second wind in a minute,' Joe told him.

'Not if I know it,' he returned. 'I would rather let Max scourge me every morning before breakfast than pound along at that pace. I should simply be run in for trying to commit suicide directly I got back.'

'You waste such a lot of breath in talking rot,' Joe returned.

They walked slowly on for two or three minutes, while Ormsby changed his disease with bewildering frequency, and chuckled quietly to himself whenever he hit upon a name that pleased him; and then a man in a dogcart overtook them, and was promptly invited by Joe to give Ormsby a lift into Granby.

'What's the matter with him?' the driver asked.

'Nothing,' Ormsby instantaneously replied.

'He's got so many things he's got mixed,' Joe hastened to explain.

'Hop up, and put this rug round your shoulders. There's room for two, but there's only one rug.'

In spite, however, of Ormsby's protests and persuasions, Joe refused to drive, for as soon as he was left to himself he meant to find out what this wind of his was worth. Never before had he suspected that he could run, and if the suspicion turned out to be true, he saw a chance both of appeasing his father and propitiating Max. The daily runs that he had been compelled to take had not troubled him in the least, but they had been nothing more than glorified jog-trots, which even the notoriously paceless Cole and the apparently windless Ormsby were able to get through without attention being drawn to their infirmities.

But now as the dogcart disappeared round a corner, and Ormsby, having made a characteristically quick recovery from his various maladies, gaily waved his hand, Joe set out seriously to test his wind. And the result was both surprising to himself and to Ormsby,

who had not been in his room for five minutes when Joe joined him.

'Who picked you up?' Ormsby asked, and turned round from the fire he was trying to light.

'Nobody,' Joe answered; 'but if you put the sticks on the top of the coal you'll never get that fire to go.'

'The coal sort of worked through the sticks; there's about half a pound of lump sugar down at the bottom. Perhaps you had better put it right while I get changed, and while you change I'll make the tea.'

'All right,' Joe agreed; but soon afterwards he discovered that Ormsby was not in the best of tempers.

'It's like this,' he began, when tea was ready: 'I thought you'd missed it. When a fellow you've got used to suddenly starts an incurable disease, I'm blessed if it won't take all the taste out of this strawberry jam. I shall eat jam, because I once heard a doctor say that it's very good stuff for anyone who's done to the world to eat; but I don't expect to enjoy it.'

'You'll be wasting good stuff, then,' Joe said, and helped himself liberally.

'That may be; but it's my duty to keep up my constitution at a time like this.'

'You *do* blither!' Joe said from a full mouth.

'I don't,' Ormsby replied; 'for if you can run as fast as Mr. Beechcroft of Shotover Church Farm—and he'll be glad to see us any day—can drive, you'll win the Long Stourford Run in a year or two, which is more than any of your great brethren ever managed to do.'

He waited for this statement to be denied, but Joe merely spread another biscuit (they were not allowed to eat new bread, because they were supposed to be in training) with jam, and said nothing.

'Perhaps you *want* to win the Stourford Run,' Ormsby said.

'Don't you?'

'I might as well want to kick my hat from here to Jerusalem and back.'

'You may suddenly find you've got a wind. If I've got one, I believe it's only just come.'

'You talk of the blooming thing as if it is a gale that springs up in the night. You're born with a wind or you aren't. I wasn't; you were.'

'I'm not so sure about that.'

'Anyhow,' Ormsby continued impatiently, 'it doesn't make any difference how you get the thing as long as you have got it. I'll bet five bob to an old bootlace that you're going to beat all sorts of records. I knew you couldn't help it, though I've been pretending that you could. It's in the blood; it isn't your fault, but all the same it's pretty sickening.'

Joe got up and kicked the fire, then he turned on Ormsby and again surprised him.

'You're a rotter,' he began, 'because you've been bucking me up to do things I'm no good at, and trying to make me believe I am good at them. Then when you suspect that there is something I may really be able to do, you sneer and grouse.'

'That's not true,' Ormsby interrupted; but Joe paid no attention.

'It seems to me,' he continued, 'that you are glad enough for me to buck up at things I'm precious little use at, but when there is a chance of me doing something fairly decent you cut up rough.'

'That's a beastly thing to say.'

'It is,' Joe admitted; 'but I'd got to blurt it out.'

For over a minute Ormsby sat with his legs stretched out in front of him and his hands clasped behind his

head, and then he jumped to his feet and smacked Joe on the shoulder.

'By Jove!' he exclaimed; 'I believe it is true. I'm jealous; I'm gnawed—that's the right word—with the yellow demon of jealousy. I want to keep you all to myself, and if you once become Rumboldish I know I shall lose you.'

'You are a jolly lot more likely to become what you call "Rumboldish" than I am,' Joe said; 'but I am going to try to be as Rumboldish as I can.'

'Not really?'

'Yes, really. My father wants it; my mother thinks I ought, at any rate, to make a shot at it; and old Max preached a sort of sermon to me about it. I've made up my mind to try.'

'I knew this would happen,' Ormsby groaned, and fell back into his chair.

'But you have been egging me on to do it.'

'I know; but I never thought you would.'

'If you think I want to, I don't,' Joe said savagely.

'It doesn't make a pin's worth of difference what you want. If you're going to try, you'll get there; you can't help it.'

'You're a jolly lot more certain than I am.'

Then Ormsby raised an empty tea-cup to his lips and said: 'Joe is dead; long live Rumbold Quintus!'

'If you weren't such an awful rotter, I should spread the rest of this jam over you,' Joe said, and gazed into the pot.

'I don't believe there is any. Are we allowed to eat jam?'

'Nobody said we weren't.'

'I don't believe a real Rumbold would run any risks,' Ormsby replied. 'What do you think has happened to Cole? I'm going to see.'

As if he was in a desperate hurry to leave Joe to

fit himself into his new skin, he dashed out of the room and in a very short time returned with a crop of information.

'There's been a kind of inquest, or whatever you call it, on Cole, and he's been found not guilty. Rose reported him to Palmer, and Palmer consulted Armitage, and the two of them went to Rose's room and sent for Cole. They decided,' Ormsby continued, 'that Cole acted under great provocation, and that, although he must be licked for chucking a house-prefect into a heap of snow, Rose is not to be allowed to have a whip any more.'

'How on earth did you find out all this?' Joe asked.

'From Cole, who told me I wasn't to go jawing about it because Armitage says it's a disgrace to the house. Cole was beaten by Palmer, but he says he never felt it at all and that Rose is simply fuming.'

'Is he still going to run with us?'

'I'm blowed if I know, but I hope he will, for we'll just treat him as if he isn't there. We'll toboggan to-morrow, if we all have to be licked for it afterwards.'

'It's worth a licking,' Joe agreed.

'It's worth both that and the best part of my last eighteen bob,' Ormsby replied, and went off to enlist tobogganers and to swear them to secrecy.

But at breakfast on the following morning Ormsby and his fellow-conspirators received a buffet that shattered their hopes.

Since the frost, Max had seemed to withdraw the interest he had always shown in the house, and to most of the squeaklings, who knew nothing of his interview with Palmer, this was a cause for some astonishment and not a little rejoicing. No longer did he scurry round the hall asking awkward questions, noticing with critical and unerring eyes things

that untidy boys had vainly hoped might escape attention, stimulating everyone—if the truth is to be told—with his own infectious keenness.

He appeared, in fact, suddenly to have dropped the reins, and to have left his house to guide itself ; and Battersby, who loved to be driven, and was a Maxite to his marrowest bone, complained nightly to an unsympathetic audience in the dormitory. The house, Ormsby assured him, was only having a rest-cure, which everyone had better enjoy while it lasted ; but Battersby's fear was that Max had become suddenly and incurably slack, and he moaned over the future, and was so gloomy about everything that Webster showed obvious signs of envy.

Battersby, however, was troubling himself quite unnecessarily, for Max was only waiting his opportunity to step in and teach Palmer a lesson, and his chance came when he met the Second Fifteen, short in numbers, and without anyone to look after them, returning from Durdington.

At the time he passed them by without a word, but when he came into breakfast he stood at the top of the table, and, resting his hands upon it, said :

' In future it will be unnecessary for any school or house prefect to run with the Second Fifteen, for I have decided to do it myself. To-day being an extra half, we will start to Durdington at two o'clock.'

Palmer looked stolidly at a half-eaten sausage, Armitage looked straight at Max and smiled, West began hurriedly to drink some coffee that was too hot to drink, Rose smiled a sickly smile.

' Well,' Battersby said at the junior table, ' I'm blowed if he isn't the finest old sport in the world.'

' I've wasted the best part of a quid,' Ormsby muttered to Joe.

CHAPTER IV

LIONS' DENS

ALTHOUGH Palmer received Max's announcement without any visible sign of discomposure, he was considerably agitated by it. Owing to Rose's failure, and perhaps to a surfeit of skating, he had already told Armitage and West that he was going to see after the Second Fifteen for, at any rate, the rest of the week. But now, he thought, 'a stopper had been fairly put on everything,' and as he ruminated over his sausage, he came to the unsatisfying conclusion that the only thing left for him to do was to strain Max's powers of belief to their utmost limits. So he dawdled through his breakfast until even the most strenuous eaters in the house had left the hall, and then went in pursuit of Max.

During the last few days scarcely a word had passed between his housemaster and himself, and when he knocked at the study door and was told to come in, he expected anything but a friendly welcome. Max, however, received him with a cheerful smile and an apology for keeping him waiting for a minute until he had written a note. The minute was a very long one, and Palmer spent his period of waiting in rubbing his eyeglasses and wondering why he had come. The tables, as far as he could see, had been fairly turned upon him, and it was rather a way that tables

had when anyone fought with Max. Still, without knowing exactly how such a result was going to be brought about, he hoped that he should be able to leave the study without confessing that victory had entirely slipped from his hands. But Max never smiled in that cheerful way unless he felt extremely happy, and what on earth there was to be happy about unless it was the breakfast announcement, Palmer could not imagine.

While Max wrote his note and addressed the envelope, he glanced occasionally at Palmer, and when he had finished his smile was more evident than ever.

‘And now, Palmer,’ he said, ‘what is it?’

‘It was only that I meant to run with the Second Fifteen to-day, sir.’

‘But that would be interrupting your skating,’ Max replied most amiably.

‘It doesn’t matter, sir,’ Palmer replied; and, taking off his glasses, he seemed to blink for mercy.

‘Oh, but it matters very much,’ Max assured him; ‘besides, there is no longer any necessity because I am going.’

‘I made up my mind last night, sir. You may not believe it—I shouldn’t if I were in your place—but it’s true,’ Palmer said.

‘Of course I believe it—I believe every word of it. But wasn’t it a little late in the day?’

‘They’ve been running all right.’

‘And the rest of the house?’

At this Palmer replaced his glasses on the remotest tip of his nose and said nothing.

‘Not that tobogganing isn’t excellent fun,’ Max added.

‘It’s jolly good exercise,’ Palmer said, with some show of spirit.

‘But it wasn’t in the contract,’ Max replied good-

humouredly, 'so don't you worry any more about the Second Fifteen. I'll see to them until the frost goes.'

'I wish you would let me do it, sir,' Palmer replied. But Max shook his head. 'You have had your chance; it is now mine,' he said.

'Everyone will talk,' Palmer grumbled.

'What do you think they will say?'

'They'll say that you are running because Armitage, West, and I want to skate.'

Max turned away for a moment so that Palmer should not see him laughing. If the Head of the house was obstinate he was also magnificently straightforward, and Max was both pleased to teach him a lesson and to find that he possessed qualities which justified the confidence that had been placed in him.

'After all,' Max thought, 'I was right when I chose him to be Head'; and, having banished the upsetting suspicion that he had made a mistake, he felt wonderfully pleased with both himself and Palmer.

'I suppose that is what they will say, but really it doesn't make much difference how they gossip as long as the house is sound,' he replied.

'I hate fellows gossiping about our house,' Palmer muttered.

'And quite right, too,' Max agreed; 'but this is rather an exceptional case, isn't it?'

And then Palmer gave up the struggle. He had imagined that the fight had been finished days before, and that he had won; but now he saw clearly enough that he had been living in a fool's paradise, and that he had got to pay heavily for his tenancy. There was nothing left for him to say, or, if there was, he could not think of it; so he looked rather sheepishly at Max and grinned. And Max, not mistaking the meaning of that grin, held out his hand.

'We have had a good fight,' he said, 'and I ex-

pect we shall be all the better friends for it. But don't you worry about me; I shall enjoy these runs.'

Palmer gave Max's hand a violent shake, and turned away with the feeling that the sooner the frost disappeared the better. But before he had opened the door Max spoke to him again.

'Do you happen to know why Rumbold and Ormsby did not come back with the rest of the Second Fifteen yesterday afternoon?' he asked.

'No, sir; but they were both at call-over. I took it myself,' Palmer said.

'Never mind; that sort of thing is often not worth inquiring into.' And while Max was speaking there was a knock at the door.

'Come in,' he said; and as Ormsby entered the room Palmer escaped from it.

* * * * *

Max's announcement had so severely affected Ormsby's plans and pocket that he had left his breakfast almost untouched, and had fled to his room to what he called 'straighten things out.' So, when Joe joined him, he had decided upon a plan and thought it very wise and good.

'It's like this,' he began: 'whichever way you look at it, we're in the soup—precious thick soup, too. I've asked the carpenter to bring the toboggans to meet us in the road about half-way between here and Durdington, and if I just run past him he'll only shout.'

'We might get there first and tell him what's happened,' Joe suggested.

'He's as deaf as a post, and I still owe him five bob which I've got by selling my stamps to Piper.'

'Not the whole lot for five bob?'

'Well, yes; but that's all right. Piper will soon

want five bob himself, and perhaps I shall have it then. Anyhow, they had to go. But it's worth it, if we can only toboggan.'

'Of course we can't.'

'That's where you are wrong. Max is a sportsman, isn't he?'

Joe supposed that he was.

'Well, if I go straight to him and tell him how he's upset everything, and just explain things, I think he'll turn out trumps. He's not an ordinary beak, and I'm going to see what sort of a beak he is, for he's got to know sooner or later, and I'd rather tell him now than on that rotten road.'

'He'll simply foam at the mouth,' Joe said.

'Not he; he's as pleased as Punch with himself this morning, and I'm off to tackle him.'

* * * * *

The most casual observer might have noticed that Ormsby entering Max's room looked far less gloomy than Palmer departing from it. In fact, Ormsby had beguiled himself into believing most confidently in Max's sporting instinct, and, as good fortune willed it, he could not have tested his belief at a more propitious moment.

In the neatest possible way Max had punished Palmer, and the future of the house no longer seemed to be in the smallest danger. Palmer, refusing to attend to his duties, had been a source of great annoyance, but the last few minutes, in which he had been begging to be allowed to take up those duties again, had more than compensated Max for all the doubts and fears and anger he had felt.

'I was wondering,' he said to Ormsby, 'whether I would send for you and Rumbold, and now you walk straight into the lion's mouth.'

'I came to ask you to let me do something, sir.'

‘Then it must be something you are not allowed to do,’ Max replied ; but he did not look in the least annoyed.

‘Yes, sir, it is.’

‘At any rate, that’s honest.’

‘I might not have been so honest, if I could have helped myself, sir.’

‘That’s more honest still—almost foolish,’ Max replied ; but he had marked Ormsby down as a boy who would presently rise to an important position in the house, and was strongly prejudiced in his favour.

‘I wanted to ask——’

‘First, let me ask you something,’ Max interrupted. ‘Why were you and Rumbold not with the Second Fifteen last evening?’

‘That’s a part of the whole story,’ Ormsby replied ; and then he had an inspiration, and stopped to think about it for a moment. Was it fair to give Joe away ? Undoubtedly it was, because he had said that he wanted to be Rumboldish. And the quickest way for Joe to arrive at that blessed state was to put Max on the track. Besides, if Max, keen on Joe as he was, knew what had happened, he would undoubtedly feel in even a better temper than he already appeared to be. Whether Joe liked it or not, Ormsby determined to tell Max about the run back from Durdington, and he did not see any use in making out the performance less wonderful than it was.

In answer to Max’s command that he should tell the story, he laid his cards with engaging and extremely courageous frankness upon the table. He, however, omitted, and Max noted the omission, to mention that while the Second Fifteen had been jogging along dreary roads the rest of the house had been amusing themselves in various ways. Indeed the only excuse

he made for himself was that possibly a change for a day or two might do everybody some good.

'They give the 'Varsity crews champagne, sir, when they get stale, at least the papers say that they do. I thought tobogganing might stop us from getting sick of——'

'You can't tell me anything about 'Varsity crews,' Max interrupted, 'and I should say that the chief reason why you want to toboggan is because you like tobogganing.'

'That is the chief reason, sir,' Ormsby confessed.

'Isn't it the only one?'

'It was until I came in here.'

Max gave a short laugh, but as he did not speak Ormsby decided to play his trump card.

Without any compunction, now that he was really fighting to save those toboggans from being wasted, he proceeded to speak about Joe's wind. So far he had tried to think of this wind as a nuisance that might possibly disappear or, at any rate, not develop; but now that he considered it his trump card, and, moreover, one of which Max obviously approved, he made it out to be the most wonderful thing he had ever seen or heard of. Whether what he was saying was quite true or not, he did not stop to think; a subject that lent itself to exaggeration was at his disposal, and under such circumstances he could not resist the temptation to embellish it. For the time being the really important question was not Joe's wind, but tobogganing, and, according to his ideas, it was perfectly fair to exaggerate the one if it was likely to be of any help to the other.

'You will be late for chapel,' Max interrupted at last; 'but I think we had better finish this off now. From what I understand, these toboggans are to be brought to meet us this afternoon. How you meant

to use them if Rose had been running with you, I do not understand.'

He paused for an instant, but Ormsby did not feel inclined to offer any further explanations.

'Then I may take it,' he continued, 'that your intention was to toboggan in spite of Rose. That is, of course, sheer contumacity.'

At that moment Ormsby regretted both the toboggans that he had bought and the stamps that he had sold. Max, he thought, was not such a good sportsman after all, and poor old Joe had been given away to no purpose. If, however, a charge was to be brought against him, it was a small consolation to be accused of something that might impress Joe, and 'sheer contumacity' ought surely to do that.

'Sheer contumacity,' Max repeated, and then—to Ormsby's undisguised astonishment—the cloud that had seemed to be settling over the proceedings suddenly lifted.

'You are tired of running every day,' Max continued, 'and I am not altogether surprised. You shall have your holiday this afternoon, and I will toboggan with you. To-morrow we will see whether Rumbold can do the wonderful things you have told me.'

'Thanks awfully, sir; that's simply ripping!' Ormsby exclaimed; and then, to his credit, he thought of Joe. 'Rumbold,' he added, 'ran a terrific way at top speed yesterday. I expect he'll be feeling jolly tired for a bit.'

But this remark was a mistake, and Ormsby promptly wished that he had been less considerate of Joe.

'I have only one thing more to say to you,' Max replied, 'and that is to advise you during the next few years to mind your own business. In that way

you will probably save both yourself and me a lot of trouble.'

'I'll try to remember, sir,' Ormsby said, and looked at his watch.

'Yes, you will undoubtedly be very late,' Max told him.

'The bother is that I was late yesterday as well.'

'Then your class-master will have something to say to you, and, of course, Palmer will deal with your absolute defiance of the rules of training.'

'I am quite ready to be beaten if I can only toboggan first; I always knew that I should be.'

'And I sincerely hope Palmer will not disappoint you,' Max said, and he hurried from the room before Ormsby could explain that some of the less adventurous members of the Second Fifteen were not altogether anxious to toboggan, if the price of that amusement was to be a beating from Palmer.

But, after all, the main thing was that Max had not only given leave for them to toboggan, but had even promised to toboggan with them. In the natural fairness of things Max ought to share the punishment if he took part in the pleasure, and although Ormsby could not quite see Palmer beating Max, he meant to put it to the more timid members of the squad that it would be an outrageous swindle if they were not all treated alike.

Eventually Ormsby arrived pantingly in his classroom, and began one of the stormiest mornings of his life by a sharp encounter with Mr. Ussher. An imposition for being late was only what he expected, but he thought it a mean trick to put him on to say 'rep' before he had recovered his breath. In a normal condition, however, he could not have said a word of the repetition, for the simple reason that he had not made the smallest attempt to learn it. There had

been far too much to think of, and to do, on the previous evening without bothering about 'rep,' and the time in which he might have hastily prepared some of his work had been spent with Max. Mr. Ussher again showered impositions upon him, and then called upon Joe. But as only about half of the class had to say 'rep' on one morning, and Joe had been put on during both of the previous lessons, he had given it what he called a 'bye.'

'I don't know it, sir,' he said, and he did not rise from his seat.

'Stand up,' Mr. Ussher roared, 'and go on.'

Joe stood up, but he explained that he could not 'go on,' because he had not learned the 'rep.'

Then Mr. Ussher broke forth into violent denunciations. 'I thought,' he said, 'that I should catch you if I put you on three times running. It's the sly trick that the whole class is constantly trying to play; none of you can be trusted to do a stroke of work if you can possibly avoid it.'

'You never do trust us,' Joe muttered, though what induced him to be so reckless he was never able to explain.

'What did you say?' Mr. Ussher asked him, and the class wriggled with excitement.

But Joe merely stood and looked at him. Already in the frying-pan, he began to think that even that precarious position was preferable to the fire.

'Are you deaf as well as incorrigibly lazy and impertinent?' Mr. Ussher roared; and Ormsby, who had retired to the bottom of the class, gave a short laugh and then proceeded to cough violently.

'Incorrigibly' was a word which Ormsby had once told Joe 'sticks bang in my gullet,' and it had been agreed with gusto that no master who was not a first-rate rotter would ever use it. For Mr. Ussher to be

emphatically branded at this critical moment as a 'rotter' was unfortunate in one respect for Joe, since it seemed to him that 'incorrigibly' sounded a challenge which Ormsby would never dream of refusing.

'I am neither deaf nor incorrigibly lazy, sir,' he answered; and, though he tried to speak calmly, his tone was not a little combative.

'Then tell me what you muttered to yourself.'

'I said that you never trusted us——'

At this there was a faint murmur of assent from the class, but Mr. Ussher ignored it.

'Now tell me what you mean?'

The answer to this question was too obvious for Joe to resist, and he promptly made it.

'I meant what I said, sir,' he replied.

'I am not going to bandy words with you. Tell me at once what you mean,' Mr. Ussher retorted immediately; and 'bandy words' appealed so strongly to Ormsby's sense of the ridiculous, that he was told to go out of the room and not come back until he had stopped coughing.

'I am better already, sir,' he said in a smothered voice.

'Do as you are told at once, or you won't return to the room for the rest of the morning,' Mr. Ussher roared, and Ormsby jumped from his seat as if he was thoroughly alarmed by this threat.

A momentary lull followed Ormsby's disappearance. Mr. Ussher performed what the class called 'finger-work' with his hair, and seemed to be trying to remember what he had been doing before this complication with Ormsby had set in, while Joe stood watching the proceedings, and felt extremely inclined to giggle.

'Now that we have got rid of that impudent boy,

I will trouble you to tell me what you mean,' Mr. Ussher, having regrasped the situation, said to Joe.

But before the latter could begin to explain his meaning, the 'impudent boy,' looking a picture of penitence and innocence, returned to the room. As he sat down he said in a voice almost breaking with what he intended to signify contrition, 'A little tickling in my throat, sir, which I do not think will occur again. I wish to apologize for making such a disturbance.'

Mr. Ussher looked sternly at Ormsby, but failed to detect even a glimmer of a smile. Indeed, at that moment Ormsby contrived to look as if he was sorrowing heavily over his own and Joe's misdeeds.

'If it does occur again, you will regret it,' Mr. Ussher said.

'That, sir, was what I was trying to tell you,' Ormsby replied with terrific gravity.

'There is no necessity for you to tell me anything,' Mr. Ussher, who never knew when to leave a boy alone, replied.

'I will try to remember that, sir,' Ormsby said in tones of the deepest respect.

The hour for repetition was slowly passing, and several boys in the class, who, like Joe, had given their 'rep' a bye, began to hope that the whole time would be taken up in exciting altercations. Ormsby, they thought, had scarcely kept the ball rolling as long as he might have done, but Joe was still in reserve, and the fun with him might reasonably be expected to last for several more minutes.

Once more at liberty, Mr. Ussher for the third time turned on the main offender and asked him what he meant; but although Joe had been given ample opportunity to think over his answer, he was still very doubtful what it would be. Should he just say,

'I don't know,' and let Mr. Ussher have a long and triumphant innings, or should he really tell his class-master what he believed to be the truth, and have—so to speak—a run for his money? He felt a joy in the struggle, but it was a sombre joy. Given a reasonable master, he had not the smallest wish to consider him an enemy. The hostility between Mr. Ussher and his class was due, Joe considered, wholly to Mr. Ussher's determined idea that every boy was instinctively a rogue and a villain.

And then, while Joe was still looking at Mr. Ussher and wondering what he should say, the boy next to him whispered: 'Keep it going, Rumbold; I don't know a word of my "rep."' And an appeal for help, even of a totally selfish kind, was enough at that moment to make Joe abandon the idea of not making a fight.

'I think, sir,' he said, and he blushed most vividly as he spoke, 'that the reason why we—I mean I—am not to be trusted is because you wouldn't trust us if I was.'

'You speak so indistinctly that I don't understand you,' Mr. Ussher replied; but from the expression of fury on his face everyone knew that he had both heard and—which was more to be wondered at—understood. Joe, however, having once taken the plunge, set to work to leave no doubt whatever about his meaning.

'Go to the bottom of the class and come to me at twelve o'clock: you will regret this. Kennedy,' Mr. Ussher said, with a calmness that disappointed those who had expected a more prolonged respite, and most thoroughly disgusted the boy whose name he had mentioned. For Kennedy had also been 'on' during the previous lessons, and had to confess that he could not say his 'rep.'

By this time, however, Mr. Ussher knew that he

should have to hurry if he was to plumb the depths of the iniquities of his class, and in turn Peacock, Alderson, and Smallwood were called upon and found wanting. In fact, the procession to the bottom of the class continued until Miller, who looked like an angel, and was the most daring and expert cribber in the school, appeased Mr. Ussher's wrath by saying his lines with apparent wracking of memory, but really with his eyes glued on a page torn from the book, which he had partially concealed behind a piece of most innocent-looking blotting-paper. At once Mr. Ussher expatiated on the difference between Millar and the clump at the bottom of the class, and while Miller listened to the praises showered upon him, he removed the means by which he had gained them into the safe seclusion of his pocket.

At twelve o'clock Mr. Ussher gave Joe a note, and told him to take it at once to Dr. Manning. So far Joe had been spared any private interview with his headmaster, and he fully expected this one to be both painful and short. Short it certainly was, but it was not painful in the sense that he had anticipated. The Man was on the point of leaving his room as Joe entered it, and in less than no time the note was read and the punishment inflicted.

'Deliberate impertinence—gross laziness—bad example to the rest of the class—ability which he absolutely declines to use,' Dr. Manning muttered while reading Mr. Ussher's complaint, and then tossed the effusion neatly into the fire.

'Look here, Rumbold,' he said hastily, 'this won't do. Don't let me hear of this again. Go to the office and get five hundred lines of imposition paper, and you can spend this extra half in seeing how silly you are. Virgil's "*Æneid*"—and bring them to me tomorrow at twelve. Now go.'

Joe went, and as he waited for his paper to be given to him, he wished that the Man had not been in quite such an obvious hurry. Mr. Ussher apparently could just write what he liked, and although Joe did not feel inclined to deny the charge of deliberate impertinence, he would have liked to have said that he was not grossly lazy. In short, he thought that Dr. Manning might have taken the trouble to ask a few questions before he convicted and sentenced him, and he did not see any use in working hard if a master like Mr. Ussher was to brand him as a slacker.

By the time he got back to Oakshotte he was angry with both his headmaster and his class-master, and was quite ready to join Ormsby in an orgie of abuse of masters in general.

'It's an outrageous swindle: the Man ought to have licked you and got it over,' Ormsby said as soon as the state of affairs had been explained to him.

'He was going off to play fives or something. He scarcely read Ussher's note; he just believed it. I can't toboggan,' Joe replied, for during the morning he had been told what a sportsman Max was.

'Half a minute,' Ormsby said, and he began to rout about in a drawer, which Joe had been forbidden to use because the first chapter of the 'Life of Max,' and other literary compositions, were supposed to be hidden in it. 'Here we are,' Ormsby said; 'I bought them for a bob and sixpence from Piper last term. Piper would sell his thumbs for five bob a brace; he only bought my stamps to get a profit on them.'

Joe, however, was looking through a Virgil to see if he could find a promising place to begin.

'Shut that blooming book; the job's done,' Ormsby continued, and thrust five hundred lines of Virgil in front of Joe's nose.

Joe picked them up and looked at them greedily.

'It will be a fair score off both Ussher and the Man. Piper's always doing lines and selling them, and it's a bit of luck that these are Virgil ; he charges more for Virgil.'

'I'm blowed if I can do that,' Joe said, and laid the covered imposition paper on the table.

'Rot, it's a chance in a lifetime. You simply must see Max tobogganing.'

'The writing isn't a bit like mine.'

'The Head doesn't know your writing from Adam's.'

'Supposing he found out.'

'Then he'll lick you, as he ought to have done this morning.'

'What about Piper ?'

'Oh, he has to stand the risk ; they would only be about twopence a hundred if he didn't know he might be nabbed,' Ormsby said ; and as Joe did not seem to be pleased with the idea, he went on to say that he wished he had never bought the toboggans, and that the whole afternoon would be spoiled, and that it was simply rotten not to take such a chance.

'It is not,' he finished up, 'as if you deserved it ; you do more work than most of the fellows in the class, and twice as much as I do.'

'I don't do half as much as I used to,' Joe said.

'Let's rip up that new lot, and then we shall have settled it,' Ormsby replied.

And as the bell rang for dinner Joe, with a queer feeling of distaste for the whole affair, tore up the unused paper, and Ormsby put it in the fire.

'There is no use in leaving that little lot lying about,' he said.

'Piper might have liked it,' Joe told him.

'So he might ; what an ass I am,' Ormsby remarked, and went off to dinner in the best of spirits.

CHAPTER V

WIND

FOR some reason known only to himself, Ormsby expressed a most ardent wish that Max would run in shorts and socks. But this peculiar desire to see his housemaster careering bare-legged through Granby was not gratified, for Max dressed himself in grey flannel trousers, and wore a blazer that had once been blue but was now faded to a very rusty hue of greyish brown. Nevertheless, clad as he was, he created a considerable sensation when he appeared with the Second Fifteen.

Masters who did not like him shrugged their shoulders and declared that it was even the most undignified thing that he had dared to do. Mr. Ussher, into whom the squad ran full-tilt as they turned a corner in Granby, was disgusted beyond words when Max called out to him: 'Come on, Ussher, a run will do you more good than walking about in an overcoat and half a dozen scarves.' Max did not wait for a reply, and if he had waited, Mr. Ussher was not in a fit state to make one. For Joe's class-master was rendered temporarily speechless by the sight of a middle-aged man running with a lot of junior boys.

'We shall soon have him bowling a hoop up to school in the mornings; Lomax ought to be locked

up,' he muttered, and wrapped his scarf more tightly round his neck.

Some of the young athletic masters considered that Max was a rare old sportsman, and some of them thought that he was a bit of a freak. But Max would not have cared in the least if every master and boy in Granby had assailed him with most hostile criticism, for he was, in his opinion, putting his house in order, and when he was so employed trifles like conventions and magisterial dignity might go to the winds as far as he was concerned. If one part of his nature was solely tyrannical, he had also a part that was solely boyish, and on this afternoon he not only intended to enjoy himself like a boy, but he even managed to feel very much like one.

Before, however, he began to toboggan, he had a lengthy argument with the Durdington carpenter, with the result that instead of Ormsby paying another five shillings, the carpenter paid him half-a-crown.

'Mr. Stokes,' Max explained to Ormsby, 'has kindly promised to take these toboggans back with him this evening. We are only hiring them for the afternoon.'

'How ripping,' was all Ormsby could manage to say, as he pocketed his money and resolved to have his stamps back from Piper.

And then, during the remainder of the afternoon, Max took charge of the proceedings, and whether flying down the hill or helping to pull a toboggan back again, he entered into the spirit of the sport with a whole-hearted enjoyment that brought forth praises from every boy who was present.

'Isn't he absolutely topping! He's having the time of his life,' Battersby kept on saying, his great ambition being to go down with Max and help him to pull the toboggan back.

'Plenty of beaks wouldn't mind going down, but they'd shy like two-year-olds at lugging the things back again,' Crake declared.

'I shall write and tell Arkwright about this; it's a jolly lot better joke than any of those things he's tried to work off on me,' Webster said very solemnly.

'Fancy old Boyd or Ussher doing this; they'd have half a dozen fits before they would get in to one of these rickety things,' Cole announced.

Ormsby, however, was the boy who sang a perpetual pæan of praise. He was, so to speak, the leader of the chorus, for he could not forget that his toboggans would have been wasted if Max had not behaved like 'the decentest beak alive.' So he proclaimed his housemaster as *the* sport of sports, tested beyond the shadow of a doubt—just IT, and nothing else. A town-crier could not have used his voice more sonorously.

Max would have been deaf indeed had he not heard some of the remarks made about him, and some of the comparisons that were drawn between him and various other masters. But if he did not altogether approve of this volubility, he, at any rate, took no steps to discourage it. Loyalty to his fellow-masters had never been a conspicuous feature of his character—in fact, he had not infrequently astonished the boys in both his class and house by the unbridled way in which he spoke of his colleagues. In all such matters he was a law to himself, but although he enjoyed popularity when it came his way, it must be said that he never sacrificed a single one of his opinions to gain it.

'Has anyone got a watch?' he asked at last, when both of the toboggans were at the top of the hill, and no one answered. 'It isn't very likely that any-

one would have,' he added, 'but it must be time for us to go home.'

Then Ormsby beseeched him to let them have one more turn, and when this request was granted there was a scramble to get seats for the final ride. From this rush Max stood aloof, forgotten by even Ormsby and Battersby, while Joe rolled from his seat into the snow before the toboggan had gone twenty yards.

'What frightful rot,' he mumbled, as he shook some of the snow from his clothes, and then, looking up the hill, he saw Max standing by himself. Even convinced as he was that Max must, after all, be a good sport, he had no overpowering desire to have a *tête-à-tête* with him. For whenever he was alone with his housemaster he began to hunt for things to say, which is the surest way of not finding them. To avoid such a fruitless hunt Joe began to walk slowly down the hill; it looked rather rude, he knew, but the alternative was too terrifying. And then Max called to him, and there was nothing to do except to go up the hill again.

'Have you enjoyed yourself?' Max asked him.

'Rather,' Joe answered.

'You certainly look about a thousand times fitter than you did last September.'

'I am awfully fit.'

'They tell me you can run.'

'Who on earth told you that, sir?' Joe asked.

'As a matter of fact, Ormsby told me.'

'Oh, Ormsby!' Joe said, as if that settled the matter.

'You don't seem to think much of Ormsby's opinion?'

'Not when he says I can run; he hasn't got much of a wind, so he thinks anyone with a little bit of one is a sort of wonder.'

'Then you don't think much of your wind?'

This seemed to Joe a most absurd question. 'Of course I don't, sir,' he replied.

'Why "of course"?' Max asked him.

'Well,' Joe began, and scratched up a little heap of snow with his boot, 'if I thought I had a wind I should never say so.'

'Why not?'

'It wouldn't be good form, sir. Besides,' he added, 'I don't suppose I have any wind to speak of.'

But Max was laughing too loudly to hear Joe's disclaimer.

'The real Headmaster of Granby is not Dr. Manning, but a fellow called "Good-Form"; he is a Mede and Persian rolled into one, and it is about time for someone to take a bomb and to blow him into ten thousand pieces,' Max declared.

'I always thought you were in favour of Granby traditions, and all that——' Joe stopped to think of a suitable word, and then added rather doubtfully, 'stuff.'

'So I am,' Max replied, 'when there is some sense in them; but all this mock-modesty makes me furious. When Good-Form makes a good cricketer pretend he isn't when he knows perfectly well he is, it is encouraging the very worst kind of "side."'

What all this had to do with him, Joe couldn't imagine, for he did not consider that he was mock-modest, and to hear Max discussing modesty of any kind made him feel almost irresistibly inclined to laugh.

Max, however, recovered quickly from his outburst against Good-Form, and looked critically at Joe's bare legs.

'You have heard,' he said, 'of the Stourford Run.'

'Yes,' Joe replied, and wondered if it was possible for legs to blush.

'Well, this year the Playground Committee have decided that there is to be a shorter run for boys under sixteen—about four miles.'

Joe saw his companions dragging the toboggans slowly up the hill, and wished that they would hurry up; but he did not speak.

'You must enter for that race,' Max continued, 'and win it.'

'I have never won any race, unless you count an egg-and-spoon race.'

'I certainly don't,' Max said emphatically.

'Nor do I,' Joe agreed.

'The reason why you have never won a race is probably because you have never tried, or perhaps you have never found one that was long enough for you.'

Such an idea as this at once set Joe's riotous imagination to work. He pictured himself wandering over the world looking for a race long enough for him to win. Mere Marathon races he rejected as if they were sprints; the sort of race he wanted was one that would go on for several years, so that while it lasted he would be left alone by such enthusiasts as his father, Max, and Bingo.

'Have you ever tried to win a race?' he heard Max asking.

'I used to start—everyone used to start; it was a sort of rag,' Joe replied.

'That's just it; it mustn't be a rag any longer. You have a wind—'

'But I'm not sure—'

'You have a long wind,' Max continued, and, as interruptions did not seem to improve matters, Joe gave them up; 'and it will please your father and me very much if you train your hardest and win this race.'

'Good gracious,' was all that Joe could say; but it by no means expressed his feelings, which were a mixture of indignation with Ormsby and astonishment at Max.

'Your trouble, Joe, is that you don't make up your mind to win. As long as you think you can't do anything, you won't do it. Promise me you will try all you know to win this race.'

Max spoke with a gentleness that was most unusual, and Joe felt inclined just to say 'Yes,' and have done with it. But then he thought of the disappointment that his running would ultimately cause, and decided to prepare Max for it.

'You see, sir,' he began, 'I'm not fifteen, and Ormsby doesn't know——'

'Promise,' Max interrupted.

'All right, sir, I'll have a shot.'

'An honest shot.'

'Yes; but I'll bet I'm last, sir,' he replied, and then rushed down the hill to meet the tobogganers.

The end of that afternoon was not so pleasant for the Second Fifteen as the beginning, for all of them were late for call-over, and Palmer resumed his interest in the house by using his cane with what was generally considered to be a total lack of justice and mercy.

Several boys who had congratulated Ormsby on his 'wheeze,' came indignantly to his room and asked him what the blazes he meant by it. No one ever fell from his pedestal of popularity with a more resounding thud than Ormsby.

'You're like a lot of chaps who go "tick" for things at Mother Bloomfield's and never intend to pay her,' he said in defence. And when asked to explain what he meant, he declared that of course they had got to pay for their afternoon's fun. 'I've paid twice,'

he added; 'I'm minus about fifteen bob and plus five weals on my body.'

'And a jolly good job too,' Crake, seeking consolation where he could find it, said.

'I,' Piper declared, 'shall go and report Palmer to Max. I never meant to be licked all the time I'm here, and now my record's gone.'

'Such a rotten record as that deserves to go,' Harper, whose Adam's apple seemed to be careering with excitement over the latest development of the afternoon, announced.

'If you go to Max, you'll make things a thousand times worse. You've *been* licked, and I don't see anything to grouse about,' Ormsby said.

But this cool way of taking things was not at all to the taste of the fellows who had crowded into the room.

'The only thing to do which is fair,' Webster at length informed the meeting, 'is for our dormitory to take a vote and see if we oughtn't to beat Ormsby.'

'What on earth for?' Joe asked.

'Because,' Webster replied, 'he got us to toboggan under false pretences.'

'Rats,' Harper remarked.

'It seems to me fair, don't you think so, Cole?' Piper inquired.

'If you ask me, the man who wants beating is Max,' Cole answered in his gruffest voice.

'You're coming on, Cole,' Ormsby said; and he was the only fellow who was sitting down, and also the only one who remained perfectly calm through the proceedings.

Ultimately the meeting fulfilled Ormsby's expectations by breaking up without coming to any decision, and when the last fellow had left the room, he turned to Joe and yawned loudly.

'Gas-bags,' he said.

'Why did you go and tell Max I had a wind?' Joe asked abruptly.

'Has he buttoned on to that already? I thought you were a bit sulky coming home. I'm sorry, but it had to be done,' Ormsby replied; and as he did not feel thoroughly pleased with himself, he got up and poked the fire.

'You've let me in for a real bad time; I've got to go in for the Junior Stourford Run, which the Playground Committee have just arranged.'

'Well, it won't hurt you to start. As far as that goes, I'll start with you; we can soon stop. I'm one of the best starters and stoppers in England.'

'But I've promised Max I'll have an honest shot at winning it,' Joe said.

'That's a nuisance,' Ormsby admitted; 'but perhaps you *will* win it.'

'Don't talk such frightful rot!' Joe replied, and picked up a book.

Ormsby, however, was not inclined to leave him with what might be taken for a genuine grievance unless it was properly sifted.

'I'm really most awfully sorry, Joe,' he began—
'I really am; but I found Max in a good temper this morning, and I guessed that if I just shot out your wind at the right minute he'd let us toboggan. He's deadly keen on you being an eighteen-carat Rumbold, and you told me you meant to be. So where's the harm?'

'I hate anyone gassing about me; I shall look a most awful ass when I finish last,' Joe said, without looking up from his book.

'If it's any use to you I'll promise to finish behind you. I'll go on finishing until it's dark. I'll stay up all night; but I will finish,' Ormsby declared.

Joe, however, was not to be moved by this attempt at facetiousness ; he merely grunted, and continued to read.

‘ Look here, Joe—and for mercy’s sake chuck that mouldy book—don’t go about with a hump. You aren’t made for humps, and the glooms don’t suit you a bit. Besides, you ought to be jolly grateful to me.’

‘ Why ? ’ Joe asked, and he put the book upon the table.

‘ I shall have to think a little ; but, all the same, I feel cocksure that, generally speaking, you owe me tons of gratitude,’ Ormsby assured him.

Joe reached for his book again, but Ormsby was too quick for him.

‘ No,’ he continued ; ‘ I can’t think if you read ; but I know two reasons already why you ought to be bubbling over with gratefulness.’

‘ What are they ? ’ Joe asked.

‘ First, those five hundred lines this afternoon.’

‘ That was decent of you,’ Joe admitted ; ‘ but all the same I feel sort of rotten about it.’

‘ That will pass off all right. Anyhow, it’s much better than aching fingers.’

‘ What’s the second thing ? ’

‘ Why, bagging your pocket-book. You never praised me half enough for that.’

‘ There wasn’t any reason why I should,’ Joe said without thinking ; and then realized that the truth about that pocket-book would at last have to be told.

‘ What on earth do you mean ? ’ he heard Ormsby asking ; and in response to this question he related what had happened on the night of Max’s dinner-party, and although Ormsby listened without any comment, he began to look gloomier and gloomier.

‘ So,’ he said, when Joe had finished, ‘ you have let

me go about for months hugging myself about that rotten pocket-book, when you knew all the time that I had done nothing.'

'I got in a funk that you would get dropped on. Whatever I did, I did it to save you,' Joe explained.

'I hate being saved—and why the dickens couldn't you tell me about it? What's the good of keeping things so precious dark? Why can't you trust a fellow a bit?'

'I thought you would be in a bait,' Joe answered, and grinned a little.

'I don't mind so much being saved as walking about thinking I'd done you a good turn when you really had done me one. I call that the sort of thing a worm like Piper would do.'

'I always meant to tell you; but you seemed to forget all about the pocket-book and the whole affair.'

'But of course I didn't,' Ormsby assured him. 'I was simply wondering every day when Max would find out; just then I wanted to have a go at Max. I was also simply bursting with pride at having dared to bag the thing. Supposing I had burst.'

'Then I suppose I should have been hung, or something,' Joe said, and tried vainly to look solemn.

'It's no use laughing; you've played a low-down game on me. You sort of walk about with all kinds of things inside you that you never tell a soul, while I blurt out everything to you. It isn't fair,' Ormsby declared.

There was enough truth in this to make Joe think before he answered.

'All right,' he said at last, 'I'll try to blurt everything out; but you'll be bored stiff in a week.'

'I'm ready to risk that as long as you will come out of your rotten shell. Anyhow,' he added, 'I've

got you over these lines ; you would never have tobogged if it hadn't been for me.'

'I should have had writer's what-d'you-call-it by this time,' Joe said.

'Cramp,' Ormsby returned ; 'and you would have had a kind of itching up the arm—I always do when I have to write. I shall get it to-night, for old Ussher has given me enough to last for hours.'

Without any more delay he started upon his impositions, outwardly, at any rate, quite cheerful now that he had settled that Joe owed the afternoon's fun to him. Apparently he had forgotten that Joe had already paid for this fun by being beaten by Palmer, and would have to pay again if Dr. Manning discovered by whom the lines were really written.

Ormsby, however, was quite right in believing that the Head was not likely to know Joe's handwriting, but both he and Joe had forgotten that Mr. Ussher had seen them running during the afternoon, and might be even more suspicious than usual.

During preparation Joe had to write some Latin verses, and even for such a master as Mr. Ussher he could not prevent himself from trying to do them as well as possible. Merely the rhythm of Latin verse appealed urgently to Joe, though had he confided this fact to Ormsby it would have been received with open-mouthed wonder. The thing to do with Latin verses, Ormsby considered, was to get them over in the shortest possible time, and by fair or foul means to make them scan. Pursuing this plan he paid the smallest attention to the English, and as long as he got the quantities right he did not care in the least about the quality. Some of the adjectives he applied to most innocent nouns were courageous to the point of foolhardiness, and he kept a string of pet and useful words which he used continually.

That Joe could possibly take an honest pleasure in such a task would have been quite beyond his powers of belief. Even masters themselves were beginning to wonder whether it was any use to make fellows do Latin verse, and that, Ormsby often declared, was the most sensible thing that they had ever done.

On this evening, possibly because Ormsby was more silent than usual, Joe managed to do some verses which he told himself were not so frightfully 'bad,' and when Mr. Ussher read them through while the class were at 'Maths.' on the following morning he was convinced—though not pleasantly convinced—of their excellence. When Joe returned to his class-room at twelve, Mr. Ussher called him 'up' and asked him what punishment the Head had given him.

'Five hundred lines,' Joe said, and blushed furiously.

'When have you got to show up your imposition?'

'Now, sir.'

'And yet you could run yesterday afternoon, and had time to do your verses?'

'I did run,' Joe admitted.

'Are your lines done?' Mr. Ussher asked, and this question sent the unhappy Joe into an agony of doubt and desperation.

If he said 'Yes' Mr. Ussher would probably ask to look at them, and if he said 'No' the Head was just waiting round the corner for him. Besides, though in such a fix this was little more than incidental, the one answer would be untrue and the other true.

'No, sir, I have not done them,' he said at last.

'But I saw you carrying a lot of imposition paper and putting it in your desk.'

This, Joe felt, was extremely disastrous, but he did not feel inclined to make any remark about it.

‘Didn’t you put it in your desk?’ the inquisitor asked.

‘Yes.’

‘Then kindly bring it to me.’

If a stand was to be made, the time, Joe decided, had come. It was absolutely useless, he felt sure, to put up a fight; still, with a man like Ussher, you never quite knew what might happen.

‘Those lines are for the Head; they have nothing to do with anyone else,’ he said.

‘If you will excuse me, they are as much my concern as the Head’s. Fetch them.’

‘But——’ Joe began, and was immediately interrupted.

‘Fetch them, or I shall go and fetch them myself,’ Mr. Ussher said, but he omitted to say that he had already examined the imposition.

Then Joe went slowly to his desk, and handed up Ormsby’s present.

‘Whose writing is this? It most certainly is not yours,’ Mr. Ussher declared.

‘No, it is not mine.’

‘Whose is it?’

But although this question was repeated several times, Joe resolutely refused to answer it. Piper, without doubt, was falling into what Ormsby called ‘the soup,’ but Joe had no intention of hastening the descent.

In the end he walked into the Head’s room, carrying with him the lines, a note from Mr. Ussher, and a specimen of his own handwriting; but, to his supreme satisfaction, he found that the voice that had told him to come in belonged to a servant who was preparing to clean the windows.

'If you want 'im,' the man said with a jerk of his thumb towards the Head's chair, 'I reckon 'e's playin' fives or sommut.'

'Thanks; I can do quite well without him,' Joe replied.

'That's what most of 'em think who come in 'ere,' the servant said, and gave the window a preliminary rub.

Without stopping to place his various offerings upon the table, Joe left the room and went back to the house. A fine sleet—which looked like turning into rain—was falling, and his doubts whether they would have to run in such weather were quickly set at rest.

'Max has just been round, and there's no running to-day. He wants us to go and play about in the gym,' Ormsby said as Joe entered the room.

'Piper and I are in for it,' Joe replied, and told the whole story.

On this occasion, however, Ormsby did not listen in silence. In fact, he most violently abused mankind in general, and Mr. Ussher in particular. He also spent quite two minutes in bestowing peculiarly unsavoury names upon himself.

'I've landed you in this, and I've jolly well got to get you out of it. It's really rather sport being stuck fairly and squarely in the soup. We've got to go and see Max. He's our man,' he poured forth.

Joe did not quite see where the sport came in; but as regards being 'in the soup,' it was, so to speak, his soup and not Ormsby's.

'You are not in this, anyway. I took the lines, and have got to stand the racket,' he said.

'I am in it, up to the eyes in it, and whether we go and see Max singly or together, I'm going to see him—and the sooner the better,' Ormsby declared.

From this determination nothing that Joe could say would turn him, and finally they went and put the whole case before Max.

‘Let me talk,’ Ormsby begged Joe, as they went up the passage; ‘our only dodge is to make out you never deserved the impot in the first place, and that the whole thing’s a swindle.’

Whether Max believed this view of the case, which was mightily insisted upon by Ormsby, neither of them ever knew. But he certainly listened to it with some patience, and apart from two or three very disagreeable remarks about dishonesty and lies, he did not appear to be particularly angry with them.

‘Leave this to me,’ he said. ‘I will see Dr. Manning this afternoon, and you’—he looked at Joe—‘will hear more about it. As for you, Ormsby, you seem to have elected yourself counsel for the defence, a very voluble one, too; but your part in the affair is now over.’

‘I persuaded him to do it. I gave him the lines,’ Ormsby hastened to reinform him.

‘Who wrote the lines?’ Max asked, and looked from one to the other.

But neither of them answered, and Max did not repeat the question.

‘The meanest thing about the whole despicable business is that some boy should write lines, and, I have no doubt, sell them. I’ve heard of that happening before,’ he said, and then, to their intense astonishment, he tore the lines into several pieces, and only retained one piece.

‘We did well to go to him,’ Ormsby told Joe after the interview was over; ‘but I expect Piper will catch it hot.’

And in this expectation he was quite right. For, although Joe was caned by the Head and compelled

to listen to a most perfunctory 'jaw,' Max quickly discovered that Piper was the lines-merchant, and dealt with him in a way that reduced that acquisitive youth to wailing and gnashing of teeth. But not a single fellow in Max's could be found to sympathize with his lamentations, for the feeling in the house was that although a boy who sold lines was occasionally useful, he was always contemptible.

After a day of sleet and drizzle, the frost broke up completely, and left the Playing-fields in a state of indescribable slush and mud. Efforts were made to play football, but the turf suffered so much that the Playground Committee met and decided—to Max's disgust—that the Second Fifteen Challenge Cup would not be competed for.

Hockey and training for the sports, fives, rackets, and the 'gym' competition were, however, really enough to distract boys from overworking themselves, and Max pounced upon Joe, as a hawk does upon a sparrow, and talked daily about the Short Stourford Run.

That his wind was not just a thing of a day Joe found out directly he began to train under Max's and Palmer's supervision; but when he looked at some of his year-older opponents, he did not imagine for a second that in the race he should see anything but their backs—and those only in the far distance. Nevertheless, having made a promise, he faithfully kept it. He ate what he was told to, and no more; he ran as he was ordered, and rubbed his legs whenever he could remember that this was a part of the Maxian system of training—in short, he became a kind of machine out of school, and in school his work went to the dogs.

But to all appearances Max was very pleased with him, and as Cole seemed to have forgotten his feud,

and Rose had ceased to be of any importance in the house, Joe was so contented with life that he gave up working for Mr. Ussher without any regret. If not a Rumbold already, he began to think that he must be one in the making.

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CHAPTER I

THE RACE

WHEN Mr. Rumbold saw Joe on the morning of the race, he looked him over from top to toe.

'You've got a good colour,' he said; 'but to my mind you seem a bit fine-drawn. Has Mr. Lomax been over-training you?'

'He's been very decent about it, and most fearfully keen,' Joe answered.

'It looks to me as if he had been too keen. You are as thin as a herring naturally; it isn't as if you were a mass of fat like that boy Street you introduced to me.'

Perhaps Max was too enthusiastic to be a wise trainer, for as rest was never a remedy he prescribed for himself, it did not occur to him that anyone else was likely to benefit from it.

Nevertheless, Joe had enjoyed his weeks of training, rigorous though they had been. His worry had not been the preparation for the race, but the result of it. With all his might he had tried to prevent his father and brothers from coming to see him run, but his efforts had been as futile as Ormsby had warned him they would be.

Mr. Rumbold, Flip, Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo had all arrived from various directions on the morning of the race, and Joe's room—so Ormsby declared—

had become a loose-box into which crowds of Rumbolds came to inspect the youngest of their family.

‘I,’ Ormsby said to Joe, when the inspection was over and the Rumbolds had gone to lunch, ‘am the old cob that keeps the thoroughbred quiet. Every crack race-horse has to have a kind of mongrel hanging on to his tail, or he won’t eat. I’m the mongrel.’

But now that the time for the race was rapidly approaching, Joe was far too nervous to reply to Ormsby with any spirit.

‘They didn’t take much notice of you,’ he admitted.

‘Your father nodded, and the one you call Pads was all right. The rest of them in a bunch are, perhaps, a bit much. I think one of them might have remembered that I also am a starter in this race. No one has ever troubled to train me. I’ve been abominably neglected ; but I mean to start,’ Ormsby replied.

‘It’s awfully decent of you,’ Joe said, and then the dinner-bell rang.

During the meal Max was busy with final advice, but the only consolation Joe could find in the approaching exhibition was that his mother was not going to see it.

‘Please don’t come,’ he had written to her. ‘I know Max thinks I can run, and I expect he’s told father all about it, but I can’t run *fast enough*. There are some great, whopping men in this race, sort of sixteen-to-morrow kind of people, and there’s one fellow called Macdonald in Frensham’s who everyone, except Max, says is bound to win by miles. But as long as I finish before everyone has gone away I shan’t mind, and I may not be absolutely last, because Ormsby, who has been training on new bread and tons of cake, says he means to finish if he has to stay up

all night to do it. I have promised to go out with a lantern to look for him, if he's still finishing when it's dark.'

The Long Stourford Run which started at half-past two was won with ridiculous ease by Armitage, and this success in the senior race made Max almost childishly anxious that his house should bring off the double event. He buzzed round Joe like an inquisitive blue-bottle; but Ormsby stuck close to his stable-companion, and beguiled the period of waiting with a never-ceasing flow of comments upon their fellow-competitors.

Joe, however, scarcely pretended to listen, for the more he inspected the runners who were 'under sixteen' the more ludicrous did he feel. Macdonald seemed to have grown several inches in the night; Reece, Compton, Drummond, Ellis, and Mills-Lewis all looked as if they could cover about two yards in a single stride; while Battersby, who had just won the Junior Gym competition, and who wished that the race was forty miles instead of four, kept on hopping about and assuring Ormsby that he had never felt fitter in his life.

'Do you mean to finish?' Ormsby asked him.

'I mean to have a jolly good shot at winning,' was the reply, and Ormsby laughed, for Battersby was built rather for feats of strength than for running, and was nearly as broad as he was long.

'Halloa, you've got to start,' Pads came up to Joe and said. 'Do your best, and don't care a bit what happens,' he added, and with this encouragement Joe took his place in the long line.

The race began in the Playing-fields, and after the competitors had passed through the gates, they had to cover two miles in winding roads, and then run over about a mile of the Granby Common until they

reached the London Road, which led them straight back to the finish at the starting-point.

'You will have the wind dead in your face crossing the Common. Don't fluster yourself there. Let them race for the lead, if they want to. You keep yourself for that last mile, and you will catch the whole lot of them—and win,' Max had said to Joe during dinner, and Ormsby had promptly declared that it was advice that he should most carefully remember.

However, when the pistol was at last fired, Ormsby was bitten with the brilliant idea of getting first out of the Playground, and so he started as if he was running a quarter-mile; but Joe, getting badly jostled in the crowd, was nearly last when he passed through the gates. The next mile was merely a procession, for no one except Ormsby seemed to be inclined to force the pace, and he, after keeping the lead until he was nearly windless, saw a primrose in the hedge and calmly stopped to pick it. With the flower in his mouth, he waited for Joe and then ran beside him.

'Good egg,' he said, 'there are at least seven fellows behind us, and one of them is old Battersby, panting like ten engines. Are you pumped yet?'

'No,' Joe said, and gave a kind of gurgling laugh.

'Well, stick to it,' Ormsby told him. 'I'm going to leave you now and have a single with Battersby. I believe I'll finish in front of the old brute.'

Then Ormsby finally disappeared, and Joe began steadily to improve his position. Every now and then he passed a small cluster of fellows who, having run themselves to a standstill, had propped themselves up against gates or each other.

When he came to the Common, Joe was in the first twenty, but the leaders looked to him to be hopelessly far away. Nevertheless, he remembered Max's advice, and with the wind whistling in his face he made no

attempt to catch those in front of him. The worst of it, he thought, as he ran smoothly over the Common, was over, for at any rate he was practically bound to finish within two or three shouting distances of the winner, and that was as much as he had ever expected to do. Visions of pleasing his father began to dance before his eyes, and during the last mile he hoped that he might be able to overtake a few more of the fellows in front of him. Racing, in fact, was rather fun after all ; he felt the thrill of it, and the desire to pursue the leaders until he dropped.

But before he had done with that Common the wisdom of Max's advice was abundantly evident. One boy stopped suddenly, and, with his head bent towards the ground, seemed to be searching patiently for something he had lost. Two fellows running side by side stumbled and fell, and then sat on the grass and tried to find breath enough to abuse each other. And just as he was leaving the Common he passed a small group who looked as forlorn as a bunch of tired waiters. Two of them, Joe noticed with terrific pleasure and surprise, were Drummond and Compton. Things, he decided, were certainly looking up.

There were, however, a dozen fellows still ahead of him, and the leader was over a hundred yards away. To catch him looked altogether out of the question, but as he came on to the London Road, he knew that the time had come when Max expected him to think of spurting. But could he spurt ? His wind was sound enough, but his legs began to feel abominably as if they belonged to someone else. It was as if the top of his body wanted to go on and on, and as if the lower part refused to move. Still he had got, he told himself, to put on speed, and with a tremendous effort he succeeded in spurting until he had passed eight more fellows. And then, try as he would, he could not get

any nearer to the boy in front of him. Running some ten yards directly behind him, Joe became absolutely dead to everything except the terrific necessity of diminishing that gap. To finish in front of one more fellow was his sole aim and hope. He had no idea that the boy whom he was trying to catch was rapidly overhauling the leaders ; he was totally oblivious of the shouts that were arising as he drew nearer and nearer to the finish. And when he at last saw the big gates of the Playing-fields, he had an extraordinary notion that someone had been moving them while he had been running.

The shouts were now so terrific that they sounded to him like a confused roar ; they buzzed in his ears and vaguely worried him ; but, try as he would, he could get only a little nearer to that great striding fellow in front of him, and as he passed through the gates he felt suddenly as if he was going to fall. And then he heard a shout close to his ear : 'Spurt, Joe, and you've got them ; they are all done to the world.'

He knew that this was Max's command, and somehow or other it had got to be obeyed. So he made one more effort and blindly forced himself on. Instinct guided him, for he could scarcely see where he was going ; but in that final rush towards the spot where an immense crowd seemed to be gathered, the thought that his father and Max were watching flashed through his brain, and helped him to make a most determined and desperate spurt.

But of that spurt, or of what happened directly afterwards, he could remember nothing, for as soon as he passed the post he promptly collapsed ; and the next thing he was conscious of was that he was lying on the ground, and that someone was saying : 'He'll be all right in a minute. Give him air.' Then everyone seemed suddenly to vanish, and presently he be-

came aware of a most horrible taste in his mouth. Two or three times he tried to get rid of this annoyance by swallowing, and by sending his tongue for short journeys round his mouth ; but as these efforts only made things worse, he sat up and saw his father, Max, and a lot of other people staring at him.

‘ I’ve simply got a vile taste in my mouth,’ he said.

‘ It’s brandy,’ someone told him ; and then his father came up to him and added : ‘ Are you all right now ? Can you get up ? How do you feel ? ’

‘ Sort of groggy ; but I’ll get up. Where’s my coat ? ’ he asked, and at this question both Armitage and Palmer began to laugh.

‘ I think the first thing I should have asked is whether I had won ? ’ Armitage said ; but as Max was already helping him into his coat Joe did not hear this remark.

‘ Perhaps he knows,’ Palmer told Armitage.

‘ Not he ; he was absolutely blind to the world,’ the latter replied, and went on laughing. This apparent indifference to the result of the race struck him as quite the funniest thing that had ever happened. Then when Joe was properly clad once more, his father patted him warmly on the back.

‘ Well run, my boy ; I am proud of you,’ he said.

‘ Thanks awfully,’ Joe mumbled ; and as he walked slowly away with his father and Max, several fellows said : ‘ Well run, Rumbold,’ as he passed them.

‘ Where did I finish ? ’ he looked at Max and asked rather shamefacedly.

‘ Don’t you *know* ? ’ Max replied.

‘ I don’t remember anything about the finish, except that there were a lot of us all close together.’

‘ The judges said Macdonald won by a foot—you were second, and Reece was third,’ Mr. Rumbold said ; but he did not look altogether pleased.

'Both your father and I think that you made a dead-heat of it; but it is no use to dispute the referee. The judges disagreed,' Max added.

'Rather not,' Joe said, and felt far too astonished to dispute anything.

'All the same, I am positively certain that Joe caught him on the tape. Don't you remember touching the tape?' Mr. Rumbold asked.

But Joe shook his head. 'I am jolly glad to have been second,' he said. 'I never thought I would be anywhere near.'

'Being second would be right enough if you had not really been equal first,' Mr. Rumbold declared in his most argumentative voice.

'After all, the referee is in the best position to see,' Max ventured to say, 'and Joe did very well indeed.'

'Of course he did. What, however, I insist upon is that he——'

'Where's Pads?' Joe suddenly asked.

'He went to send a wire to your mother,' Max replied.

'What I insist upon——' Mr. Rumbold continued. But again he was interrupted, for as they went through the gates of the Playing-fields they met Dr. Manning, who was evidently both annoyed and excited.

'These races for small boys must never take place again, Lomax. They are a great mistake,' he said. 'I've had about a dozen parents bamboozling me out of my life. We can't have boys falling all over the place and being given brandy. It's wrong, absolutely wrong. Look at that boy; he looks as white as a sheet now.'

'Why, you yourself were in favour of this race, and I have never seen a finer finish in my life,' Max replied.

‘ A lot of silly old women ! ’ Mr. Rumbold declared ; but Dr. Manning paid no attention to him.

‘ If,’ he said to Max, ‘ I was ever in favour of this race—and I don’t remember expressing a very definite opinion—I have changed my mind. That boy is evidence enough against such races. They create a prejudice against the school—a prejudice.’

At this moment, however, Joe caught sight of Harper slyly beckoning to him, so he dodged behind Max and crossed the road.

‘ I thought you’d be glad to get away from the Man and Max. Who is the other old buster ? ’ Harper asked.

‘ He’s my father.’

‘ Oh ! ’ Harper exclaimed, and after a pause he added, ‘ I didn’t know it was a sort of family gathering. Perhaps you’d better go back.’

‘ Not I. Here’s Pads coming. He’s my brother,’ Joe said.

‘ Street told me you had a whole flock of brothers and things down here to-day. I might have known you were talking to your father,’ Harper replied.

‘ I don’t talk much to my father ; he talks to me,’ Joe explained. ‘ Don’t clear out. Pads is a most awfully decent sort.’

‘ Well run, young fellow,’ Pads said as he met them ; ‘ you would have won in another stride. I’ve been wiring to the mater. Flip, Jumpy, and Bingo went off to play rackets. Where’s the Governor ? ’

‘ He’s talking to the Man and Max. The Man’s sick about brandy and things. Do you know Harper ? ’

Harper held out a limp hand, and muttered that Joe would have the race ‘ sitting ’ next year.

‘ Next year’s a long way off,’ Pads replied. ‘ And what you’d better do now, Joe, is to go back to the house at once and have a hot bath, then stick on your

biggest coat and come to tea at Mother Bloomfield's. I'll come and fetch you.'

And then he asked Harper if he would like to come with Joe.

'I'd like to, but I don't think I will. I'd be in the way,' was the reply, and in his agitation his Adam's apple became positively frisky.

'Rot!' Joe hastened to say. 'You can do my share of the eating. I don't feel as if I could do anything but drink.'

The tea-party that followed in Mother Bloomfield's private room was, for some months, an event which Harper liked to mention on every possible occasion. Mr. Rumbold, Flip, Jumpy, Bingo, Pads, Palmer, Armitage, and West attended it, and Harper, whose worship of 'bloods' amounted to a breach of the first commandment, found himself sitting between Pads and Palmer; but the fact that he had the former to look after him was entirely due to Joe!

For no sooner had the hero of the day come into the room and seen who was there, than he blushed most furiously and button-holed Pads.

'You awful brute,' he said; 'you would have had to drag me here by the scruff of the neck if I'd known. Do stop the pater jawing. Old Harper will have a fit. He isn't used to "bloods." You'll have to sit next to him and cram him up with food. I wish Ormsby was here; he'd see the comic side of it. I left him a message to say where I'd gone.'

'I'll work hard,' Pads assured Joe; and in all truth he was as good as his word.

For the Rumbolds in conclave and good spirits were rather boastful, and on this occasion the head of the family intended to say 'a few words' to show how pleased he was that Joe had blossomed forth into an athlete worthy of his name. Indeed, Mr. Rumbold

was inclined to think that he had scarcely done justice to his youngest son, and out of consideration to his own feelings he intended to make up for any sins of omission he might have committed.

This was, in short, to be Joe's evening ; and Joe, knowing from experience that his father never missed a chance of making a speech, sat down with the fixed determination of preventing that chance from appearing. How on earth this was to be done he could not imagine ; but Pads was a good man to have on his side, and if a real crisis arose he was fully prepared to say that he felt ill, and to fly. Fortunately, as far as he was concerned, congratulations were first of all poured upon Armitage, who tried to escape from them by saying that Joe's performance was really far better than his. At this Joe found himself in the extraordinary position of making faces at Armitage, who was sitting next to him, and of telling him peremptorily to shut up. To treat a school-prefect in this way was, Joe felt, a gigantic piece of cheek, and he was relieved to find that Armitage seemed only to be amused by it.

'What's the matter with you ?' he asked Joe.

'Please keep me out of it. You don't know my father ; he's awfully keen on making little speeches, and I don't want him to jaw about me. I'm fearfully afraid he will, if he gets a chance,' was the reply.

'But how the dickens are we to stop him ?'

'Oh, sort of keep things going. If you happen to know a joke, please tell it.'

'I don't.'

'Not even a bad one ? It doesn't matter how bad it is as long as it lasts a good time,' Joe said.

Armitage thought hard for a minute, but then had to confess that he could not even remember a bad joke.

So far Mr. Rumbold had been talking to Palmer, West, and Bingo about the house, and incidentally about the things Joe was evidently going to do for it, but just at the moment when Armitage gave up trying to think of a joke there was a lull in the conversation, and Mr. Rumbold audibly cleared his throat. This peculiar noise, Joe knew, was the prelude to what he was most anxious to avoid, but except for a wink, which he aimed across the table at Harper, and which in his agitation seemed to have been misdirected and to have hit West, he could not think of anything to do. And then, as Mr. Rumbold was pushing his chair back and rising to his feet, someone was heard hurrying down the passage, and Ormsby burst into the room.

For a few seconds he stood and looked in amazement at the tea-party, and then, taking off his cap, he said: 'I'm most awfully sorry; I thought Joe was here alone with two or three fellows.'

'Come on, there's room next me,' Joe told him, and squeezed up nearer to Armitage.

Under the circumstances, there was nothing for Mr. Rumbold to do but to welcome the intruder and temporarily to resume his seat, and after a little quick whispering between Ormsby and Joe, the former declared that he would save the situation if he had to talk himself silly. Without waiting to think, he at once addressed Mr. Rumbold.

'I'm most awfully sorry, sir, to have burst in like this,' he began; 'but I've been sort of looking after Joe, and I feel prouder of his finishing second than he does.'

'It was really a dead-heat,' Mr. Rumbold said.

'I'll bet it was,' Ormsby declared, 'and I wish I'd been there to see it; but I suppose that I was about three miles away when Joe finished. But I led at

the start, sir; for about a quarter of a mile I was all by myself, with no one to talk to.'

'Ah, you wouldn't like that,' Mr. Rumbold said; but apart from kicking Joe under the table Ormsby ignored this remark.

'I simply hated it,' he agreed; 'but I'd told Joe I'd finish, and I did. Battersby, Royce, a chap I picked up on the way and who is a most awfully decent sort when you get to know him, and I, had another finish all to ourselves about half an hour ago. Royce won, but I beat Battersby. Our time for the whole course when we worked it out was one hour, forty-five minutes, thirty-seven four-fifths seconds. Royce made it two minutes longer, and Battersby five minutes shorter. That's awfully like Battersby. Do you know him, sir?'

Mr. Rumbold replied that he did not, and his manner suggested that he was not anxious to make Battersby's acquaintance.

But in response to Joe's request that he should keep it going, Ormsby burst forth into details of the race as he had run it. In the course of this strenuous contest he had discovered that Royce had a maiden aunt whose great desire was that her nephew should be an athlete. 'You see, sir,' he continued, 'the only thing Royce is ever likely to win a pot for is driving a car; he's over-grown and he's weedy and knock-kneed and a bit splay-footed; but if they would have a pot for driving cars he would have no end of a chance. We talked a lot about cars, and he's full of wheezes.'

'I detest motor-cars,' Mr. Rumbold said emphatically.

'Royce says we shall all have to come to them, even perambulators,' Ormsby replied sadly, for he had come to the end of his tether, and was beginning

to think that he had made what he considered 'a complete ass' of himself, to no purpose. And, as a matter of fact, he had aroused such strong antagonistic feelings in Mr. Rumbold that he was not to see the inside of Maiden Croft for a considerable time.

Again the chairman made preparatory noises in his throat, but on this occasion Joe was destined to be saved by Palmer.

'I am very sorry to go, sir,' he said, 'but it is nearly time for call-over, and I have got to take it.'

'You had better cut back to the house,' Pads said to Joe, who was already standing up and saying as plainly as he could without words that the party was over.

'I think Mr. Lomax will excuse Joe from call-over this evening. I want to speak to him,' Mr. Rumbold announced, and Palmer said that he could explain why Joe was absent.

The real danger, however, had passed, for Joe did not mind what his father said provided that a lot of other fellows did not hear it. But Mr. Rumbold had been considerably ruffled by the audacity of Ormsby, and when that loquacious guest had departed, he left a disturbed atmosphere behind him.

'I am pleased with you, Joe, very pleased,' his father said; 'but I really cannot understand on what system you choose your friends.'

'I don't choose them on any system—they just come,' Joe remarked.

'Take,' said Mr. Rumbold, and he began to tap the fingers of his left hand with the first finger of his right, 'the boys to whom you have introduced me to-day. First of all, Street—a mere porpoise.'

'He is fat,' Joe admitted; 'but he's sort of soothing.'

'Then Harper, who looked as if he was going to choke every minute, and never wished me good-bye.'

‘He was a bit of a fluke,’ Joe explained; ‘he just happened to come along and got asked. He’s all right, really, only he’s very shy, and gets jumpy when there are a lot of bloods about.’

‘And, lastly, Ormsby—a most ill-mannered boy. I must insist that you cultivate that boy’s acquaintance as little as possible;’ and at this command Joe ceased to look amused.

‘You don’t know Ormsby; when you really——’ he began.

‘I don’t wish to know any more of him than I unfortunately do,’ Mr. Rumbold interrupted.

‘But he is simply priceless,’ Joe declared.

‘What you actually mean by “priceless” I do not know,’ Mr. Rumbold replied; ‘but if it is intended to convey a recommendation, I do not agree with it.’

‘Priceless means anything,’ Joe hastened to explain. ‘It depends what it is stuck on to. You may be a priceless ass, or just—well, priceless.’

Mr. Rumbold shook his head. ‘I still fail to see the meaning of the word; but we were talking about Ormsby,’ he returned, and he continued to talk until Pads came to tell him that his carriage was waiting.

‘Remember what I have said. I am very annoyed with that boy; but you ran well—very well,’ were his last words to Joe, and the latter went back to the house wishing to goodness that Pads had never thought of giving a tea-party.

To abandon his friendship with Ormsby was, he considered, totally impossible, even if he wished to do so. How was he, he asked himself, to live in the same room with a fellow and not be friends with him? And what would Ormsby have to say about it? It was just possible that Ormsby would flare up and say that of course he wasn’t fit to be friends with a Rumbold. He did occasionally say things of that kind,

although Joe was convinced by now that he did not mean them. Nevertheless, it was no use to give Ormsby an opportunity to get in a bait.

So Joe dismissed his father's advice from his mind, and when he reached his room he thanked Ormsby for having saved the tea-party from a speech.

'I'm afraid your father was fearfully sick with me—he simply glared,' Ormsby said.

'He'll soon get over it. You see, he likes rubbing things in and making speeches. He can't help it.'

'It's a funny way of enjoying yourself; but I like Pads,' Ormsby replied.

CHAPTER II

DRIFT

ON the last night of the term Max gave a House-supper, and in a long speech recounted the successes of the term. Challenge Cups had crowded into the house during the last few weeks—the Sports Cup, several Fives Cups, the ‘Gym’ Cup, the Rackets Cup—and the only cause for regret was that an idiotic Playground Committee had prevented the Second Fifteen Football Cup from being added to this list of spoils.

‘There is one satisfaction,’ Max said, ‘to be gained from that childish decision, and it is that no other house has got the cup.’ (Applause and cries of ‘Where is it?’) ‘Bonham’s won it last year; I suppose they still have it; but I do not think we need grudge them the honour of storing it,’ he added; and then passed on to other matters.

On an occasion of this kind Max was in his element. Without any particular gifts of eloquence or humour, he knew precisely how to stir his audience, and to win both applause and laughter. The term was over and the results of it could be seen by anyone who cared to look at the trophies on the tables, and so for the time being Max ceased to be domineering, and spoke to his boys as if he was the father of one large family,

whose sole object was to live clean lives, keep thoroughly fit, and reap rewards.

There was an old joke in the house that Mrs. Max wrote Max's speeches, and provided all the humour there was to be found in them. But Joe, who had heard this ancient jest, searched in vain for any traces of Mrs. Max in this speech; although he could not help thinking that she must have had a hand in it, because she looked so peculiarly uninterested while it was being delivered. After all, it was but a catalogue of athletic victories, interspersed with personal remarks about the boys who had gained them; but at the end of the speech Max said very casually, and as if the fact was likely to be of interest to nobody, 'I am glad to say that Parberry has been elected to a scholarship at Emmanuel College, Cambridge.' And then Joe happened to catch Mrs. Max's eye, and her smile suddenly sent him into fits of laughter.

'What's up now?' Ormsby asked. 'Have you drunk too much claret-cup?'

'Poor old Parberry,' Joe mumbled.

'He's a smug,' Ormsby declared.

'He's rather funny sometimes. Have you seen the verses he has just written about Max?'

Ormsby's face brightened. 'No,' he said. 'Would they do for my "Life"?''

'I'm getting a bit fed up with that old thing. It never gets any forrader,' Joe replied.

'You don't,' Ormsby said, 'understand how jolly difficult it is to write a man's life. It isn't like poetry and that kind of tosh. First of all you have to study your man for years and years, and then you have got to get hold of a lot of his letters and sprawl them about all over the book. Any sort of old letter is better than nothing, but I have only got one of Max's, and that I bagged from my father.'

‘What was in it?’ Joe asked.

‘Well, it doesn’t help much,’ Ormsby admitted. ‘It’s—“Dear Mr. Ormsby, I am returning from Switzerland to-morrow, and will answer your letter in the course of a few days.” The only thing about it is that it shows that Max has been in Switzerland. I shall put it in the chapter called “Foreign Travel.”’

Succinctly Joe told him that he was an idiot, and was content to leave it at that; but Ormsby was soon asking more questions about Parberry’s verses.

‘Of course I will pay for them,’ he said, ‘if that’s what he wants. How do you pay for poetry—by the word?’

‘I’ve never bought any; but by the dollop, I should think.’

‘But what sort of stuff is it? I’m not on, if old Amaryllis and those sort of people are knocking about in it. They don’t suit my style.’

‘It’s about Max,’ Joe said, as if that finally disposed of Amaryllis.

‘If you can remember any of it, you might just spout it out. From the look of it Rose is going to sing, and I’d rather listen to a pig stuck under a gate. One blessing is, that he’s got his back turned to us; to see Rose on the way to his top note gives me creeps down the spine. I’d rather watch a man standing on one foot at the top of an eighty-foot ladder.’

At this moment, Rose, accompanied by Mrs. Max, broke forth into song, and Ormsby dropped his voice to a whisper.

‘I’m rather keen on this poetry idea. Can’t you remember a bit of it?’ he asked.

Joe’s expression was such as is often to be seen on the faces of musical people, when they are listening to a performer who has nothing but audacity to recommend him; it was a mixture of strained attention

and resignation. He waited, however, until Rose made a determined assault upon his top note and failed signally to reach it, and then he said :

‘ I think I can remember the first verse. It’s something like this :

“ To Cambridge (on the Cam) I went,
To win a ‘ schol ’ was my intent ;
But Max he did not care a cent
For me who had remained unbent,
And never to him pandered.
So tho’ through days and nights I’d toiled,
Until my eyes were nearly boiled,
I only gave him fits of blues,
Because my muscles, sinews, thews,
Have failed to reach his standard.”

There’s a lot more of it,’ he added.

Rose’s song ended abruptly, and, partly from sympathy with his failure, and partly from thankfulness for his brevity, he was warmly applauded.

‘ All the first four lines rhyme, and the fifth rhymes with the tenth, and that’s right enough ; but the other four don’t all rhyme, and that seems to me to be sort of cock-eye,’ Ormsby said critically.

‘ I don’t think it makes much difference as long as the thing sounds right,’ Joe replied.

‘ It only makes this difference : I ought to get it cheaper. It’s like buying a horse with a scar on his knee. My father won’t look at a horse that hasn’t fallen down a time or two ; for one thing he gets him cheaper, and for another he has the fun of wondering when he is going to fall down again.’

‘ It sounds to me a bit mad,’ Joe observed.

‘ My father’s rather sane for an astronomer. You had better come and see for yourself,’ Ormsby returned.

‘ These holidays are so short,’ Joe said, and felt

very uncomfortable. By all the rules of the game he knew that if he could not go to Ormsby, he ought to ask Ormsby to come to him. But his father was still furious, and seemed to have bracketed Ormsby with Cousin William on the black list. It was simply humbug to ask a fellow to come and stay with you when you knew perfectly well that he would not be allowed to come. So Joe turned to the boy who was sitting on his other side, and began assiduously to talk to him.

But Joe, in spite of the trouble between his father and Ormsby, enjoyed the last weeks of that term wholeheartedly. Some fellows still laughed at the way Max 'ran' him, but the nip had gone out of their laughter.

He had, in fact, become popular not because he was a Rumbold, but because he was himself. Inclined naturally to be a friend of all the world, if only the world would give him a chance, his good nature and good temper had made their mark, and he returned to Maiden Croft feeling not only submissive to the Maxian system, but even satisfied with it. If he knew that he had given up trying for something that figured largely in his programme when he had first gone to Granby, he had ready excuses for himself. Who on earth, for instance, could be expected to work for such a man as Mr. Ussher, and what was the use of struggling against Max, who was most 'awfully decent' when you didn't rub him up the wrong way? And then Mrs. Max had congratulated him like anything on being second in the Junior Stourford Run, and her praise was a thing worth having. Besides, there was heaps of time to work presently if he wanted to, and to be seventh in a class when you hadn't 'tried a yard' was not so bad.

If, however, Joe had been seventeenth in his class

instead of seventh, Mr. Rumbold would not have been disturbed, for in his opinion the important event of the term was the Junior Stourford Run. Joe's cup was solemnly placed in the Pot-Room, a special table was allotted to him in that semi-sacred apartment, and his Egg-and-Spoon trophy was ignominiously banished to his bedroom. But while he watched his father conducting these ceremonies, the humorous side of them struck him so irresistibly that he began to gurgle with laughter. To have laughed at such proceedings as these would previously, Joe knew, have aroused paternal indignation; but now Mr. Rumbold ascribed this display of hilarity to the gurgler's delight at having indisputably deserved a table in the Pot-Room.

'Your cup,' he said, 'looks rather small on that large table, but before long there will be plenty more to keep it company.'

'I must congratulate you again, Joe,' Mrs. Rumbold said, and turned away so that she might conceal the tears that were forcing their way into her eyes. Frequently during the last two or three weeks she had been compelled to listen to her husband's gusts of prophecy about Joe's future. Granby and Max between them, she was led to understand, had quickly knocked most of the nonsense out of Joe. True that as yet he did not show any nice discrimination in his choice of friends, but that little defect could, Mr. Rumbold declared, be immediately remedied. In a sense he had made even a better start than any of the Rumbolds, for his brothers seemed somehow or other to have been born without 'long winds.'

'I can't make out why Flip and Pads and Bingo couldn't win long-distance races if Joe can,' Mr. Rumbold had said.

'Isn't it, perhaps, more surprising that Joe can

when they couldn't?' Mrs. Rumbold had replied; but her husband never paid any attention to questions of this kind. It was foolish, he considered, to be surprised at anything his sons could do. But it was necessary to warn her not to make too much of this success, for more than once she had been 'weak' with Joe.

'You mustn't,' he told her, 'let him think that he has done enough by practically running a dead-heat against boys a year older than himself. It's a good start, but only a good start; I mean that this wind of his must not be accepted as an excuse for slackness in other directions. He has got to buckle to and get into the Eleven and Fifteen, as all his brothers have done.'

And with this warning in her ears Mrs. Rumbold had constantly tried to persuade herself that she was ready for Joe to be put into the family mould; but, in spite of all her efforts, she was conscious of feeling very rebellious and disloyal. Quite honestly she was glad that Joe had won the approval of Maiden Croft, for that would make him feel less like an outsider in his own home. Moreover, it was absurd to regret what he had done, when she herself had beseeched him to bow before Rumbold traditions and to please his father.

But all the same, she hoped almost incessantly that he would never feel inclined to set up this idol of athletics and worship it to the exclusion of everything else. Flip, Jumpy, and Bingo were never really happy unless they were playing games or talking to people who played them; even the girls with whom they were friendly seemed to be superlatively good at hockey, golf, or lawn-tennis. Pads had intermittently allowed his interests to roam beyond the Rumbold boundaries; but they waned unless they were

constantly stimulated, and although he occasionally took her to some play that she wanted to see, there was no doubting that he had done this merely to please her, and that he would have been much happier at a musical comedy. So Mrs. Rumbold had trained herself to be thankful for her four older sons as they were, and, in a sense, to be proud of them; but she had clung tenaciously to the hope that Joe's interests would not be confined to so limited an area, and until these holidays he had given her every reason to think that this hope would be realized even, perhaps, to a fuller extent than was altogether to be desired. Music, pictures, books, that were neither 'sporting' nor what Pads called—although he read them—'footling tosh,' had not only given him genuine pleasure, but had been subjects of long conversations between his mother and himself. Hours had been spent in her sitting-room that had been as infinitely precious to her as they had been profitable and pleasant to him. Hours snatched from the normal existence of Maiden Croft, and to Joe all the more enjoyable because he knew that they were snatched.

But now when Joe did come to her room, he was restless and uneasy. Something, she guessed, was bothering him; but the reason of this restlessness puzzled her. Was it, she asked herself, caused by his anxiety to be always out of doors and playing games, or was he worried by a consciousness that he was turning his back on things that she considered infinitely valuable? In response to the opportunities she gave him to confide in her, he invariably said that there was nothing the matter, and, except when he was alone with her, nothing seemed to be; for when he was with his brothers, his spirits were boisterously high. Apparently he was not only content to go into the mould, but had determined to go in joyfully.

During these holidays Mrs. Rumbold could not save herself from hating Max and all his works. She thought of him as a horrible machine which crushed all ideas and originality out of boys, and which was constructed with the sole purpose of developing their bodies and starving their minds. No doubt she was unfair to hold him entirely responsible, and she knew that she was ; but a scapegoat had got to be found, and secretly she endeavoured to regard him as the sole cause of the change in Joe.

If, however, Joe had been told that he was less of a companion to her than he had been, he would have been intensely hurt and surprised. In some ways he felt that things were not quite the same ; he was, for instance, treated as if he really belonged to the place, and the experience was so novel and pleasant that he thoroughly enjoyed it. But it never occurred to him that his mother could regret a change that she herself had asked him to effect—that, in fact, her real wish had been that he should become just enough of a Rumbold to obtain peace, and not enough to make any real difference in him.

Half-measures never had appealed to Joe. If he was to be Maxian and Rumboldish, he felt that he would have to go what he called the ' whole-hog ' ; the funny thing to him was that now that he had started on the way, he found it far more attractive than he had ever thought that it could be. Cousin William might sneer a little, indeed, he had already written rather a sarcastic note of congratulation about the Stourford Run ; but everyone else, Joe thought, would be ' jolly glad.'

The only thing that he imagined might hurt his mother's feelings was his report, and that not because of his place in class (for he had already told her that he was seventh), but from the possibility of Mr.

Ussher making very disagreeable remarks. And when Mr. Rumbold did receive Joe's report, the ordinary routine of breakfast at Maiden Croft was considerably upset, and Mrs. Rumbold entered the room while the storm was at its height.

But to Joe's amazement his father's anger was not directed against him, but against Mr. Ussher and Dr. Manning. 'Has ability which he does not use. Has been flagrantly dishonest,' Mr. Ussher had written; and Dr. Manning had asterisked the latter sentence and said: 'An especially bad case; he must learn to be truthful and to submit to discipline.' As a counterblast to these condemnations Max had praised Joe to the skies, and all the other masters had said that his work was either 'Good' or 'V. Good,' and had refrained from making any remarks about his conduct. In answer to Mr. Rumbold's questions Joe explained precisely what he had done, though he did not say anything about Ormsby's share in the disaster. Stated baldly, it seemed to Joe to sound a fairly 'rotten' thing to do—much more 'rotten' than it had seemed at Granby. But he had scarcely finished speaking when Pads said: 'I should think I did the same thing about five times. Once I tried it on Max, and got jolly well thrashed.'

'Everybody does it. I did it,' Bingo announced.

'We used to do it in my time,' Mr. Rumbold said.

'As long as there are worms who will do that sort of thing for money, and fellows are ready to run the risk, masters will always have to be on the look-out. But everyone knows that it goes on at Granby. It used to be considered rather sporting,' Flip declared.

Whereupon Mr. Rumbold made noises in his throat, and proceeded violently to denounce Mr. Ussher. In such a denunciation it was impossible to make a strong effect, unless the victim of Mr. Ussher's wrath

was held to be naturally incapable of the charge brought against him. So Joe's truthfulness and straightforwardness were vigorously insisted upon, and then having, in his opinion, proved that Joe possessed these qualities in superabundance, Mr. Rumbold proceeded to express unlimited contempt for those who dared to disagree with him.

'The fact of the matter is,' he concluded, 'that Ussher is only fit to lead a poodle about on the end of a string, and that Dr. Manning wants waking up. If the Head of Granby is going to believe what men like Ussher tell him he is neglecting his duties, and the sooner someone lets him know it the better it will be for himself and the school.'

'But,' Mrs. Rumbold said quietly, 'from what I understand, Dr. Manning could not help believing what Mr. Ussher said. Joe himself does not deny it.'

For a moment Mr. Rumbold merely spluttered, a sort of aftermath of the real storm. And then he turned upon his critic and said: 'You don't understand these things, my dear. Are you willing to admit that a son of yours can be "flagrantly dishonest"?''

'Certainly not,' Mrs. Rumbold answered very gently, 'for I don't really know the circumstances of the case. What I meant is, that it is unfair to blame Dr. Manning for believing what, as far as I can see, he had no opportunity to disbelieve.'

Hurt as she was by this sudden and unexpected attack upon Joe's character, her first concern was to prevent her husband from writing indiscreetly to Dr. Manning. Mr. Rumbold thoroughly enjoyed a controversial correspondence, and one of the occupations of her life was to prevent him from over-indulgence in this respect. As soon as he had finished his breakfast, she knew that he would clear his desk for action, and write what he called a 'scorcher' to Dr. Manning;

and her experience of masters had convinced her that such letters were anything but beneficial to the boy on whose behalf they were written.

At all costs she intended to prevent him from writing to Dr. Manning until he was fitter to deal commonsensibly with this 'insult to the family,' and so, in spite of his declaration that he wished to be left alone, she accompanied him to his study. There she was compelled to listen to several explosions of indignation, and she also discovered the exact reason of this attack upon Joe. But although she managed to make him promise that she should see the letter before he sent it, he was far too angry to agree to any further restrictions.

'I won't have people making such charges against my sons. Joe couldn't tell a lie if he wanted to,' he said; and she smiled rather wearily and left him.

For as she went back to her room she could not disguise from herself that, according to her code of honour, Joe had told a lie, whether he wanted to or not. Moreover, he had been so clearly ashamed of it that he had neither mentioned the affair in his letters from Granby nor since he had returned home. To her there was a sting in the fact that he could do such a thing, but there was a sharper sting in the thought that he could do it, and then hope that she would not be told. Nevertheless, she could not help smiling when she pictured to herself how very differently this bombshell would have been received if there had been no Stourford Run. Joe, the outcast, would have taken Mr. Ussher's place in that fiery speech of denunciation, and have been told that he was unfit to bear the family name; but now, in the very face of what seemed to her a deliberate piece of deceit, his qualities of truthfulness and honesty were for the first time warmly insisted upon.

But before she could think over the news of the morning, and try to gauge its actual importance, Joe had joined her.

‘You’re pretty sick with me, mother,’ he said, ‘and I don’t wonder.’

‘How did it happen?’ she asked.

And as soon as he had told her, he proceeded to make excuses for himself.

‘It sounds pretty rotten here, but no one thinks much about that sort of thing at school. I never said the lines were mine.’ And then he glanced at her and began to blush. ‘You think,’ he added quickly, ‘that it’s just as much a lie whether I said anything or not, and so it is; but you don’t know Mr. Ussher. He sort of makes me feel as if I would do anything to score off him.’

‘Don’t you think it would have happened with any other master?’ she asked.

‘I don’t think so, but I’m not sure,’ he answered; and for the first time he looked straight at her. ‘I am most awfully sorry about it, because you hate it so; but I shouldn’t be sorry if you had never heard about it, for inside me I don’t feel like that.’

At this she smiled, and he wondered why until she spoke.

‘My dear boy,’ she said very gently, ‘I do hate you to do things that give anyone an opportunity to bring such charges—whether they are just or unjust—against you, but I am afraid that I hate even more that you should do them and then try to conceal them from me. My only chance to be of any use to you as you grow up is for you to meet me half-way. Perhaps that would be easier for you, if you know that I would rather be hurt by what you do than ignorant of it. I don’t want to be spared, for if you once begin to hide things from me, we are bound to drift

away from one another. I have never tried to drag confidences out of anyone, but I do think that I can help a little if you will let me.'

'I'd like to, mother—I'd like to most awfully—but it's precious difficult,' Joe said.

'Why?'

'Well, fellows at Granby aren't exactly angels. All sorts of little things happen that I wouldn't——'

'I am not talking about angels or little things,' Mrs. Rumbold interrupted. 'I don't expect you to be an angel, and I don't want to hear about "little things." I have not had five sons at Granby without learning a good deal, Joe.'

'But most of the things that happen are little things,' he said.

'Of course, but there are exceptions.'

'It's so difficult to know what they are.'

She was not surprised that he made so many objections, for she recognized truly that he was trying to see his way before he made any promises. To argue the matter out and come to an understanding was far more to her liking, than for him to throw his arms round her neck and scatter careless protestations of love and penitence over her. She was not without experience of quick repentances, and the value she placed upon them was slight.

'This, for instance,' she said. 'I can't, I know, understand altogether how you look upon such things at Granby, but I can't help seeing that to buy another boy's lines and pretend they are your own is not a straight thing to do.'

'If you'd heard Ormsby and me talking about it, I don't think you would be so down on me,' Joe said.

'Ormsby?'

'Oh, he's all right. Father doesn't like him, but he's a most awfully good sort.'

Mrs. Rumbold refrained from commenting upon this, for although Joe's letters had told her much more of Ormsby than of himself, they had not convinced her that this friendship was very desirable. As far as she could judge, Ormsby was bent on extracting the utmost fun out of everybody and everything—in fact, she suspected that he was merely a very ingenious buffoon, whose manners were (so Mr. Rumbold had assured her) sometimes conspicuously lacking. But she was wise enough to keep these opinions to herself, since she admitted that she had no very sound reasons for holding them. For Mr. Rumbold was as indiscriminately abusive of people whom he disliked, as Joe was uncritically enthusiastic about those whom he called 'awfully good sorts.'

Ormsby, however, was not important at present, whatever he might become later on. What she wanted now was, as she had said, for Joe to meet her half-way, and as he fidgeted about her room, picking up things here and there and looking at them without interest, she wondered whether she was not making too much of what was, after all, the first really serious occasion he had given her to blame him. Should she just say that they would forget it, and begin afresh with a clean slate? That was the easiest way, but she was not at all sure that Joe would approve of it. For unless he had altered marvellously in the last few weeks, his desire would be to get to the bottom of this trouble; to face it, and not to evade it.

'Do you want me to go on trying to please father and Max?' he asked at last, and his voice unconsciously contained a note of challenge which she did not miss.

'Of course you must,' she replied steadily. 'But need that occupy all your time?'

'I suppose it oughtn't to,' he said doubtfully,

‘and I dare say with a lot of fellows it wouldn’t. But I’m sort of rummily made ; I believe I’m an either one thing or the other kind of fellow. Supposing it has got to be one thing or the other ? ’

And suddenly she found herself confronted by a question which she had never even considered. In advising him to submit to the demands of Max and Maiden Croft she had not imagined that he would turn his back upon the things that she held dear—those things that were to have been his solaces and joys, solaces which she was to have administered, and joys which they were to have shared. For one moment she longed to tell him to choose for himself, to rebel if he wanted to rebel, and to count upon her as his ally ; and then she saw that she had no right to ask him to undertake such a fight as this. If he decided to go his own way he must come to that decision without any invitation from her, and without any assurances of assistance. For that fight would entail years of misery for him, and she could not on the spur of the moment withdraw all the advice she had given and invite him to defy his father and Max.

‘ Even if that happens,’ she answered, ‘ I think that it is your duty to carry out your father’s wishes. Will you mind so very much ? ’

‘ That’s the funny part of it,’ he said at once, ‘ I don’t believe I do mind. It makes everything such a jolly lot comfortabler.’ And then he saw the look of dismay upon her face, and an indistinct idea of what his confession must mean to her flashed across his mind.

At once he jumped to her side, but no protestations of love or sorrow could really help her.

When at last she was alone she walked slowly to the window and looked out unseeingly. Far beyond

his comprehension he had wounded her ; he had given up all she had striven to teach him with an incredible carelessness and gaiety, and he did not seem in the least to realize what he was abandoning.

But the one thing that kept on thundering in her mind was that he could not be blamed. She had asked him, so she persuaded herself, to try for something that was contrary to his nature. He had to be 'one thing or the other.'

But the future she did not dare to dwell upon, for when she thought of it she saw herself condemned to years of utter loneliness—years in which he would be growing up and learning to spurn more and more the lessons she had taught him ; years in which he would be developing into a great athlete, and she would be pretending to be pleased.

CHAPTER III

THE PROPHET

DURING the remainder of the holidays Joe was in and out of his mother's sitting-room at all hours of the day. It appeared as if he could not have enough of her company, and she recognized that these constant visits were his way of trying to make amends for the disappointment he had caused.

'And I'll work like anything when I go back. Another term with old Ussher would simply drive me crazy,' he assured her.

Perhaps this reason for working did not appear to her the best possible one, although she was too grateful for small mercies to tell him so. But after he had gone back to Granby she could not help comparing his behaviour with something that had happened years and years before. Then a young brother of hers had passed into the Indian Civil Service, and during the days before he had left England his eagerness for her companionship had been very similar to Joe's. Everything was to be the same when he came back for his first leave; plans had even been made for spending it together. But Flip was nearly two years old when she saw her brother again, and additionally Flip's uncle disapproved strongly of Flip's father.

'Why the dickens,' he said 'you chose Rumbold

out of all the fellows who wanted to marry you absolutely beats me. He's such a prig that I want to rag the life out of him whenever he opens his mouth.'

She was prepared for criticisms of her husband from this frankest of brothers, but to hear him called a prig was more than she could tolerate. The word remained in her memory and rankled, for after she had heard it she found that she was continually trying to persuade herself that her husband was not a prig.

She had good days and bad days ; days when he did things that no prig would do ; days on which his conduct required more excuses than she could find. And so the examination went secretly on until she recognized the uselessness of it, and resolved to give up criticizing him. To be Mrs. Rumbold, the mother of his children, a loyal and submissive wife, was evidently all that he wished her to be, and she determined to accept the position. That she had a mind of her own never seemed to occur to him. 'Women—that is, nice women,' he often said—'have taste and tact ; men have brains and balance.' That summed up his creed about humanity in a sentence, and those who disputed it were instantly branded as rogues and infidels.

In thinking over the failures and successes of her family, Mrs. Rumbold could find much to smile over quietly, but the trouble was that she had no one to smile with. Loyalty prevented her from going outside Maiden Croft to find anyone who could share the humours of her life, and inside it there was no one except Joe who ever seemed to see the comical side of his relations, and that tendency of his could not be encouraged by her. And now he had gone off with protestations that everything would be the same in the years to come, but she was no longer young or hopeful enough to dream dreams.

Looking into the future, she imagined that he would gradually be weaned away from everything that was not in some way connected with athletic success, and the words of Stevenson, 'Our business in this world is not to succeed, but to continue to fail in good spirits,' kept on recurring in her mind. To fail and to remain in good spirits was, she thought, more than any mortal boy could be expected to do at Maiden Croft. Heaven knew that she did not want Joe to fail; where she differed from her family was in the things in which she wanted him to succeed.

He would try, she was confident, always to work hard enough to muddle through without fears of superannuation; but all his zest for learning would be gone, and presently she saw him submitting to the stereotyped schedule of conversation at Maiden Croft.

In her opinion this schedule consisted of discussions about cricket, the Boat-Race, Rugby football, rackets, and athletic sports, the subjects varying in accordance with the seasons of the year. Granby and golf, however, were never out of season, and the conversations about golf she found the most difficult of all to listen to without showing signs of weariness.

Frankly, she gave up trying to understand the phraseology of golf, but she was never able to forget the moment when Flip with a scowling countenance had informed his father that a man called Stubbs lay dead at the seventeenth hole at Woking. On that occasion her sympathies had been so wholly with Mr. Stubbs that she had abandoned her usual habit of not asking questions about things that she did not fully understand. The only result, however, of her inquiries about this fatal accident was that Flip guffawed with laughter, and said: 'Mother, you are simply a knock-out!'

As *hors d'œuvres* to this conversational banquet there

were occasional references to the clergyman who was more ritualistic than Mr. Rumbold thought fit ; to the German Emperor ; to ' scenes ' in the House of Commons ; to musical comedies and horse-racing. But the main theme was always connected with athletics. William Rumbold had once declared that to sit through three meals at Maiden Croft was like going to three concerts at which the same song was sung over and over again by different performers.

In its limited way Mrs. Rumbold did not doubt that the atmosphere of her home was very healthy. Not for one moment had any of her sons given her cause to regret their morals, and for this she was more than thankful. Athletics, at any rate, had done a great deal for their bodies, even if they had been a deadening influence over their minds. But her efforts to make them take a wider outlook, to travel, to think a little, had failed completely. Flip had once been for a week-end to Dieppe, and had suffered severely on the way back ; Pads had spent a miserable ten days in Holland ; ' England,' Jumpy said, ' was good enough for him ' ; Bingo had ventured as far as the Isle of Man. Her great hope and support had been that she would be able to keep a part of Joe to herself, and to prevent him from falling into this slough of stagnation and self-content. But now she foresaw that Maiden Croft would again be inhabited by Holiday Tutors—muscular men recommended by Max. She knew the type by heart, for in succession Holiday Tutors had ministered to the mental needs of Flip, Jumpy, Pads, and Bingo. In nearly every case these men had been carefully chosen, and had fitted themselves most comfortably into the life of the Rumbolds—they had, in fact, had a glorious time—but of only one of them (and he was an exception to the general rule) had Mrs. Rumbold any real remembrance.

Mr. Hilton's duties had been to spend two hours a day improving Jumpy's mathematics, and to make himself amiable, and in both respects he had been a total failure. Jumpy had flatly refused to 'stuff in the house' for more than an hour a day, and when he had been captured and the door closed upon him, he professed himself unable to keep awake. For two or three days Mr. Hilton struggled against a strong desire to beat his refractory pupil into wakefulness, and when he appealed to Mr. Rumbold for instructions he was told not to worry. This advice, however, did not suit Mr. Hilton, so at the end of a week he went to Mrs. Rumbold and told her that he was going.

'I am being paid,' he said, 'to do work that I am not doing and never shall do, and I can't stand it; so I have decided to go.' And he went that very day, to Jumpy's delight, but to the consternation of Mr. Rumbold and Flip, who declared that they had never seen such a 'bounder' in their lives. The idea of a tutor being admitted to Maiden Croft, and then leaving without being told to go was altogether too much for Mr. Rumbold's temper, even after he had tried to assuage it by writing a 'scorcher' to Max for sending such a man. Personally, Mrs. Rumbold had been glad when the invasion of Holiday Tutors had ceased, for although she had no objection to them as guests, she considered with reason that they were extraordinarily unsuccessful as tutors.

For the present, at any rate, she thought that Joe would be able to do without a tutor, but Max did not share this opinion. Almost the first words that he spoke to Joe after the latter's return to Granby were: 'I've got the very man to look after you in the holidays. Wheatcroft's his name. He was the best bowler in the Oxford Eleven last year. Your father will like him.'

At this Joe opened his mouth very wide, but did not speak. He was far from wanting to be what Maiden Croft called 'bear-led' during his summer holidays, and he did not mean to be if he could help it. Even if the man was not anxious to teach him anything, he would always be hanging around urging him to do things, and the truth of the matter was that he had already suffered a good deal from the superfluous energies of his brother's tutors. They had been 'decent' enough to him—most of them very 'decent'—but all the same he was far happier without them. So he just stared at Max, and wondered how he could get rid of Mr. Wheatcroft.

'I'll write to your father about him at once. He will be snapped up if we aren't quick,' Max continued.

For a moment Joe felt a glimmer of hope, but then the thought occurred to him that if Max could not get this man he would soon find someone equally unnecessary. The thing to do was to squash this tutor idea altogether; the difficulty was to discover a way of squashing it.

Max was holding an informal reception of his boys in the dining-room, but for the time being Joe was the only boy who was attending it.

'I am not sure,' he said, 'that my people want me to have a tutor in the holidays. They haven't said anything about it.'

To this Max answered something that sounded like 'Pish!' and then added: 'Wait a minute, while I speak to Sherwood.'

This was a new name to Joe, and he stepped aside to look at the boy who owned it. Not a single fellow had left Max's at the end of the Christmas term, and this was the first chance Joe had been given to look closely at a boy newer than himself. His first im-

pression of Sherwood was that he had a nice sort of face, his second that the chap was in an awful funk and was trying hard not to show it; and his third that Max was even abrupter than usual.

'I expected you at four o'clock,' Max said, as he held out his hand.

'There was a smash-up on the line I had to come by to catch the Granby train, and so I missed the connection,' was the reply.

'I'll measure you to-morrow. This is Rumbold,' Max said, with a wave of his hand towards Joe.

The hall had suddenly been invaded by several other boys, to whom Ormsby acted as whipper-in.

'Halloa, Joe!' he said at once. 'Arkwright said I'd find you here. Did you know he'd come back? How's Max?'

'He's all right; simply full of beans. This is Sherwood,' Joe replied.

'Then you are our only new chap. Three or four fellows have left, and you have got to take all their places. It's a big job,' Ormsby said.

'Isn't the house full?' Joe asked, before Sherwood could speak.

'No; we are three short, so Palmer says, and it's the first time Max has ever had a vacancy.'

'Then we'd better look out for squalls,' Joe said, and consulted Ormsby about Mr. Wheatcroft.

'I'll have him like a shot. Old Max is looking at me, so I'd better go and speak to him. Come on; I'll get you out of this hole all right.'

In about three minutes Ormsby produced nearly a dozen reasons for having a tutor in the following August, while Joe stood by his side and wondered at the fertility of his imagination. Max, however, was not to be beguiled by such an obvious device as this.

'You shall have a tutor as you want one so badly,' he said; 'but that is no reason why Joe should not have Mr. Wheatcroft. I saw you putting your heads together, and expected that something extremely stupid would be the result.'

Ormsby was prevented from making things worse by Armitage's arrival, but as he and Joe went back to their room, he declared vigorously that if Max found him a tutor, he should simply bolt to Greenland or Montenegro.

'But you said you wanted one,' Joe told him.

'To save you from being landed with him. My father will have a few fits when Max writes to him. I thought I'd just get rid of this Wheatcroft fellow for a bit, but now we've got a brace of them on our hands. I'll get Arkwright to take my man.'

To this Joe did not reply, for he could not forget that Ormsby had just been protesting to Max that he simply must have a tutor, and apparently the whole tale had been fiction from beginning to end.

'We've got a jolly good term coming,' Ormsby said, when they were in their room. 'My father says it is going to be a hot summer, and he's only been wrong twice in the last twenty-seven years; and we can get out of old Ussher's class without doing a stroke of work.'

Joe lay back in his chair and merely blinked at Ormsby. The idea of having a thoroughly slack time, of eating strawberries and cream and ices, of bathing whenever he got the chance, and of playing a certain amount of cricket, was for the moment extremely attractive. And as he pondered over it, and heard Ormsby pouring forth a delightful description of Granby in the summer, he found himself regretting the promises he had made. Definitely he had assured his mother that he would 'work

like anything,' and additionally he had told his father that he would do all he knew to improve his cricket. As regards cricket, Ormsby seemed to be keen—or more than keen—enough; but clearly he was not intending to do a stroke more work than was absolutely necessary, and also was taking it for granted that Joe would be as total an abstainer as himself.

'You see, it's like this,' he heard Ormsby saying; 'you have got to have these things mapped out, or you find yourself in the cart. First of all, there's old Ussher; I've been thinking about that man, and I've found out the way to treat him. He's down on the top fellows in his class because he thinks they crib, and he's down on the bottom fellows because he's sure they're lazy; but there's the middle left, and that's what we must shoot for. If we are about twelfth or thirteenth each week, we are safe to be moved up next term, when heaps of fellows will have left. So we needn't do more than about twenty minutes' work every night, and during the rest of the time we can really get on with Max's "Life."'

'I'd rather work,' Joe remarked.

'Max's "Life" is work, don't you worry about that. He's very difficult to do, and I've already appointed Arkwright as my assistant secretary—unpaid.'

'What did he say?' Joe asked.

'Oh, he jibbed a bit! He's rather swollen-headed because he nearly died. He'll tell you how jolly nearly he kicked the bucket, and if he gets a pain in his thumb he is to go home. He'll want looking after—he's back in his cradle again. Then there's cricket; you, of course, will make hundreds——'

'Shut up!' Joe growled.

‘Fifties, anyway; and you’ll get into the first House Eleven. I’m going to bowl for the Second Eleven. I’ve been practising all the holidays, and I bowled our doctor five times in eight balls.’

‘Was he any good?’ Joe asked.

‘As a matter of fact,’ Ormsby admitted at once, ‘he is short-sighted, nearly sixty, and hadn’t played for about forty years. But, you see, you can’t bowl your grandmother five times in eight bowls unless you bowl straight.’

‘I should think you will simply walk into the first House Eleven,’ Joe said.

‘I’m not going to try. I’d rather bowl all the time for the Second than be about fifth change for the First,’ was the reply.

Joe felt rather uneasy about this most indecent cocksureness, but he had become so accustomed to Ormsby that he was no longer surprised by anything that he said.

‘I might as well jaw to a gate-post as to you; I don’t believe that you’re listening,’ Ormsby said suddenly.

‘I’m listening all right,’ Joe assured him.

‘Then why can’t you say something? I gassed out that last bit so that you could tell me I’m a conceited ass.’

‘I thought you’d got some game on.’

‘Of course I had some game on,’ Ormsby said impatiently, ‘and it’s this. You are simply marked out for a blood; we settled that last term. I’m not going to be left behind, if I can help it; we’ll both be bloods—thundering, full-blown bloods. It might be rather fun; anyway, if we are going to do it, we had better do it quick. And the way to get a bloodship in this blooming place is to jolly well heave yourself at other fellows’ heads.’

'I don't believe it,' Joe said emphatically.

'All the same, it's true,' Ormsby continued. 'Everyone in Max's is trying for the same thing, and the chap who pushes hardest gets it.'

'Rose pushed hard enough, and after he'd barged to the front, Palmer and Armitage and that lot suddenly got sick of him.'

'That's because he's Rose, and can't do anything else except hang on and jaw. If old pious Æneas had tried to be a prize-fighter, do you think he would have made a job of it? I'll bet Dido wouldn't have looked at him.'

'What on earth has Æneas got to do with it?' Joe asked.

'Why, that a fellow is a silly ass not to do what he's fit for. Old Æneas was born "pi," and played it for all he was worth. If Ulysses was alive now, you'd be a fool to play cards with him; he'd have you all ends up; he'd be a conjurer or one of those mystery fellows. I can bowl a bit, and I mean to get a good start by making them think I'm an absolute nailer, or you'll be leaving me behind, and that would be the limit.'

'I'm not likely to leave anyone behind,' Joe remarked.

'That's only your rotten modesty which I used to think was humbug, but since have found out is a disease. We've got to bury modesty, give it a decent funeral and finish it off. For the future we are just going to be a brace of Maxites, who are fairly and squarely on the make.'

'I wonder how long we shall keep it going,' Joe said, and began to laugh.

'It will be as easy as cutting your finger. Come in,' Ormsby added at the top of his voice; and

Arkwright, looking paler and thinner than ever, opened the door.

'I'm in the same room with Sherwood, so I've brought him to see you,' he said.

'Well, where is he? Have you got him up your sleeve?' Ormsby asked, and seemed to be irritated by the interruption.

Arkwright looked behind him, and then poked his head into the passage. 'Come on,' he said; 'there's nothing to be in a funk about;' and Sherwood came slowly into view.

'Isn't it cheek for a new fellow to come and see anybody?' he asked.

'I'm bothered if I know. Sit down,' Joe said, and pushed him into a chair.

'If you are in the same room with Arkwright,' Ormsby began at once, 'you will have to look after him. He's had scarlet fever, and fancies himself; whenever he begins to grouse, you must begin to kick him. He's not really an infant, and——'

'You needn't believe a word of Ormsby's rot,' Arkwright told Sherwood.

'It isn't rot, but sound sense. I'll bet he's told you already what his temperature was.'

Sherwood, however, neither denied nor admitted this. He merely looked with a rather bewildered expression at Joe.

'As you are a new fellow, I suppose we ought to go through the things they do in books,' Ormsby continued; and Sherwood began to look more and more uncomfortable.

'Don't be such a hopeless idiot!' Joe told Ormsby.

'But how are we to know the fellow's name unless we ask him?'

'It's Sherwood; I've told you that already,' Joe said.

'I'll pass that. Then the next thing which they do in all the best books is to ask him what his father is. Mine's an astronomer; Rumbold's is a . . . I'm blowed if I know. What is yours, Joe?'

'He's a merchant.'

'And a very sound thing to be. Arkwright's is an Italian warehouseman, and makes a fortune by selling Roman candles. He's very busy at the beginning of November.'

'My father isn't an Italian anything,' Arkwright protested. 'He's a doctor, and——'

'Has about a dozen letters after his name, which mean precious little. Now, what's yours? He ought to be a Forester, but I'll bet he isn't,' Ormsby said to Sherwood.

'He's a stock-broker.'

'I wonder,' Ormsby continued, 'if he knows my uncle, who is on the Stock Exchange. He calls himself a stock-broker, but my father says that he is a brigand.'

'I can write and ask, if you like,' Sherwood answered; and Joe thought him a little too accommodating.

'Anyhow, what does he broke?' Ormsby asked.

'What on earth does it matter?' Joe said.

'It doesn't matter a row of pins and needles, but they *do* ask these questions in books, and nobody ever gets sat on for doing it. Having got through that, what's the next thing?'

The next thing, as far as Joe was concerned, was an attempt to talk sensibly to Sherwood, but an imp of mischief had taken possession of Ormsby, and whatever Joe said he promptly contradicted.

'It's no use for you to come and ask Rumbold anything; you had much better come to me,' he declared.

'Thanks most awfully,' Sherwood answered.

'Why can't he ask Joe?' Arkwright inquired.

'Because he's got too much to do already. Sherwood will soon find that out for himself. When anyone's got the pip, or wants to borrow five bob, or can't do their maths or their verses, they all come in bexies to him. There's a long queue waiting outside this door every night. The only thing he doesn't do for everyone else is to learn their "rep" for them, and he'll find some way to do that before he's many months older.'

At this outburst Joe merely laughed, for it was so extravagantly absurd that there was no necessity to contradict it. Neither Arkwright nor Sherwood, however, seemed to be in the least amused by Ormsby's exaggerations; the one looked profoundly bored, and the other exceedingly bewildered. And since among his own set in the house Ormsby was not accustomed to talk to an unappreciative audience, he proceeded to make statements which even surprised Joe. Partly, Joe guessed, he was 'out' to move two apparently dumb fellows into exclamations of astonishment or denial, but in addition to this there was a bitterness in some of the things he said for which Joe could not find a reason. Frequently Ormsby had hurt the feelings of his companions by the reckless remarks he made, but such remarks had always been made on the spur of the moment. But now he seemed to be making fun of Arkwright with a real desire to hurt. It was as if he was trying his hardest to disgust Sherwood with both the Infant and himself, and why on earth he should want to create such an impression Joe could not understand.

'You jolly nearly made the Infant blub. What the blazes were you playing at?' Joe asked, when

he had got rid of Arkwright and Sherwood by the direct means of telling them to go.

'Oh, I don't know,' he answered impatiently; and having opened the window, he thrust his head out of it.

'I think that fellow Sherwood looks a good sort, don't you?' Joe asked; but if Ormsby heard the question, he did not answer it.

Something had evidently gone wrong, but what it was Joe did not know, and had the sense not to ask. During the last few months Ormsby's moods had been more than a little capricious; he had jumped from one to another with the agility of a grasshopper; but however quick and unexpected the change had been, he had never shown a trace of sulkiness. But if he was not sulking now, Joe wondered what on earth he was doing. It was a miserable way to begin a term, but no good could come from worrying a fellow who had hung himself semi-bodily out of a window, and who was obviously suffering from 'the pip.'

For several minutes Ormsby continued to look out into the night, but when he at length turned round and faced Joe, his ill-temper had completely vanished.

'I've been a perfect beast,' he said, 'and I'm infernally sorry.'

He held out a hand as he spoke, and Joe shook it because he did not know what else to do. But why Ormsby should want a sort of reconciliation scene he could not imagine. It was, Joe thought, frightfully absurd and theatrical: the whole concern had somehow or other attached an importance to itself which it did not deserve.

'You think I'm a most awful ass,' Ormsby said.

'Oh, I don't know. I don't know what's up,' Joe replied.

'I'm jealous.'

'Jealous?'

'Yes, jealous.'

'What the blazes of?'

'Guess.'

'I can't.'

'Well, of that fellow Sherwood.'

Joe at once began to laugh. 'You've got the hump at coming back here,' he said.

'Hump, be blowed,' Ormsby replied; 'if you spent your holidays without speaking to a soul who is not about sixty, you would jolly soon be sick of them. I *wanted* to come back, and then I saw this fellow Sherwood butting in, and I hated him at sight, and,' he added, 'I hated him worse just now.'

'But why? What's the matter with him? What difference does he make, anyway? He was most awfully keen on being friends with you, if you had given him the chance.'

'I've got second-sight, or whatever it's called. My mother had it. I'm weird.'

Upon this Joe could not comment. If a fellow liked to call himself 'weird,' it was his affair. But all the same he could not believe in Ormsby's second-sight. The past was very clear evidence that Ormsby had no such power, or, if he had, that he was unable to use it.

'I'm absolutely certain,' Ormsby continued, 'that Sherwood is going to try and mess up things. You see if I'm not right. He's going to split us.'

'It would take twenty Sherwoods to do that.'

'It will only take one, and that chap's the one. I suspected it directly I saw him, and I knew it when he came in here.'

'Let's go to bed. You'll be as right as rain in the morning,' Joe replied.

CHAPTER IV

AN EXACTING FRIEND

ON the following day Ormsby was in such violently high spirits that Joe ventured mildly to gibe at his powers of second-sight. If modesty was going to be buried, Joe thought that this new idea of Ormsby's might reasonably be put in the same grave. It was, in short, a discomforting idea, and the sooner it was banged on the head the better.

'You're an ass,' he said, while he was struggling to open a tin of sardines, and Ormsby was preparing to make the tea, 'not to become a racing tipster, and tell Crake, Piper, and that betting lot, what horse is going to win the Derby; but it would be funnier if you told them what is going to be last. You'd knock the stuffing out of the *Sportsman* and all those papers if you could spot the absolute last in every race; and then,' he added, for from the expression of Ormsby's face he suspected that this attempt at gibing had missed fire, 'we can live on sardines and ices and the fat of the blooming land.'

Joe threw in the sardines and the fat of the land to take the edge, as it were, off his gibe, but even the prospect of unlimited luxuries seemed to have no attraction for Ormsby. Without the flicker of a smile he listened to Joe, and then, with the teapot

still in his hand, he said what he thought of the gibe.

'Of course,' he began, 'you think I'm cracked, and that the best thing to do is to try to rot me until I'm a bit less dotty. It would be a sound scheme if you weren't such a heavy-handed rotter, and if I was really mad. But you're no good at that game, and I'm as sane as an Archbishop. You can call it what you like—second-sight, or instinct, or just knowing—but I'll bet you ten bob to a brass farthing that I'm right about Sherwood. You can't feel these things in your bones unless there is some reason. It's absolute bunkum,' he continued, with a wave of the teapot, which caused a shower of hot water to fall on Joe's knee, 'to jaw about Derby winners. I can't spot them, or I'd jolly soon be a millionaire; but whenever I get a sort of presentiment—we've often talked about this at home—I'm nearly always right.'

'This is going to be one of the wrong times,' Joe said, with determination; but he was so anxious about the teapot, which had only been purchased an hour before and had cost *rs. 11½d.*, that he was incapable of concentrating his attention upon what Ormsby was saying. He also felt a strong inclination to remark that 'Forewarned was forearmed,' only Ormsby had never received that kind of saw with enthusiasm. Something, however, had got to be done, for Ormsby seemed to be holding a committee-meeting with himself, and was apparently unconscious that the sardines were opened and the feast merely waiting for the tea.

'I should think you've warmed and swilled out that pot enough. Supposing we stick some tea in it. After all, that's what it's for,' Joe said, and succeeded in disturbing Ormsby's reverie.

'You needn't think,' he said, 'that I'm going to play the silly goat over this. "Forewarned is forearmed."'

'I nearly said that—I did really,' Joe interrupted.

'And,' Ormsby continued, 'I mean to be most awfully nice to Sherwood, and see if I can't fight it that way. He shan't separate us if I can help it. It won't be as easy as he thinks. I'll give him a run for his money. I'll——' At this moment he shot out his arm, and the spout of the teapot came into contact with the wall. The lid also fell off, and was broken.

'You've done it now,' Joe said.

'We shall have to borrow one. You go while I pick up the bits,' Ormsby replied, and promptly went down on his hands and knees.

When Joe returned with a complete teapot he found Ormsby sitting in an armchair and placidly eating sardines.

'I'll buy a new teapot to-morrow,' he said. 'If I hadn't smashed that old thing, I believe I should have been in a bigger rage than I've been in since I had a fearful beano with a governess and got sent to school.'

'You did seem a bit excited,' Joe remarked, and began to make the tea.

'Anyhow, I've got it over, and feel better. I'll promise that Sherwood shall never know what I think about him.'

'You will soon think he's all right if he is. I'm not sure about him myself. He looks decent enough, but if he'd got in a rage with you for talking such tosh I should have liked him better.'

'Let's drop jawing about the fellow. However much you are going to like him, he's going to be most

frightfully keen on you,' Ormsby replied, and began to talk about cricket.

But in spite of Ormsby's assurances, Joe felt very bothered over this extraordinary outburst of hatred. As a rule, he succeeded in dismissing things that were unpleasant and troublesome from his mind, but try as he would he could not forget that Ormsby had been in a blazing rage with Sherwood, and that, as far as he could see, there was absolutely no reason for such a display of temper. What Joe did not know—and it was the key of the problem—was that Ormsby's mother had been a most furiously jealous woman, with an inordinate capacity for provoking scenes. From his father Ormsby had inherited a great vitality and a certain queer, humorous way of looking at life ; but from his mother he had inherited a temper that, when once aroused, was totally regardless of consequences. When he was three years old his mother had died, and Mr. Ormsby, freed from a distressing domestic atmosphere, had at once set to work to root out the demon that sometimes possessed his child. As time passed Mr. Ormsby became more and more engrossed in his scientific studies, and more and more anxious to believe that his son's temper and disposition were as tranquil as his own ; but at the age of eight Ormsby had completely upset this delusion by attacking his governess and putting her to flight, and so his father had once more aroused himself, and on the very next day had marched off the culprit to a private school.

'My boy has Latin blood in his veins,' he had said to the master, 'and if he shows any signs of uncontrollable temper I wish to know. But I have talked to him, and I hope that you will not have any trouble.'

The 'talk,' which Mr. Ormsby had stirred himself up to give, had made a deeper impression than he

had dared to expect. Without being aware of the fact, he had affected his son enormously by one sentence: 'If you ever want to succeed, you will have to control your temper.' And Ormsby did want to succeed. His father was a distinguished man, the people who visited their home were almost invariably distinguished in one way or another, and he had no intention of being a failure. Mr. Ormsby might have talked to him for hours about the wickedness of ill-temper, and produced no result whatever; but if ill-temper was to be a handicap to success, then Ormsby decided that he must get rid of it.

Later on his father had said to him: 'Professor Bell told me last night that his son had referred to him, in a speech at some college dinner at Cambridge, as "the fortunate father of a distinguished son."'

'What cheek!' Ormsby had exclaimed.

'Yes; but I'd like you to be able to say that some day, if it is true.'

In course of time Ormsby had learned to laugh at and complain about the learned people who visited his father, but he had never ceased to admire them. He merely made fun of everything and everybody because, as a rule, he liked to live in an atmosphere of laughter and gaiety and cheerfulness; but although he idled and pretended to care nothing for books and for what they could give, he never really lost sight of the goal he was determined to reach.

And then he had met Joe, and for some reason which he could not explain had been strongly attracted by him. Joe, in short, had been a revelation to him, for here was a fellow with all the Granby world at his feet, and who honestly seemed to have no desire to grasp it. That Joe was a born athlete Ormsby believed then, and never really ceased to believe, and one part of success at Granby was to be won by ath-

letics, and athletics alone. Moreover, it seemed to him to be the part that was clearly the pleasanter, and so he thought it all the more surprising that Joe should take nearly two terms to arrive at the same opinion.

Once convinced that Joe's modesty was not a pose, Ormsby's affection for him increased by such leaps and bounds, that at the end of their second term the idea of being separated from him for nearly a month had been very hard to bear. Indeed, he preferred to be at Granby with Joe, than at home without him. And in his own way Joe was as fond of Ormsby as Ormsby was of him, but his affection was neither so sentimental nor so demonstrative. Ormsby's photograph of Joe was conspicuously alone on the mantelpiece of his bedroom, while Joe's photograph of Ormsby spent most of the holidays inside a book, the leaves of which it had helped to cut. Ormsby revelled in thinking out plans to 'do things' for Joe, and frequently talked about them; while Joe did 'do things' for Ormsby, and never even mentioned them.

But although this sudden and totally unreasonable hatred for Sherwood was, Joe admitted to himself, 'a bit of a startler,' still, when all was said and done, there was not a fellow at Granby who was 'a patch on Ormsby.' No doubt, he thought, Ormsby's opinion of Sherwood would soon change. It was so much easier to be friends with fellows than to go about glaring at them. At the beginning he had simply hated Cole, and Cole had hated him; but now, as far as he could see, the feud was over, and if Cole was not exactly a fellow you would borrow money to spend a holiday with, he was not so bad if you took him in the right way. The fellows in Max's were, in Joe's opinion, a most awfully easy lot to get on with, if you excepted Rose, who had retired into permanent

sulks and was having a horribly poor time because no one seemed to mind.

Everything, Joe the optimist considered, was bound to come right very soon ; but until Ormsby had got this bee out of his bonnet Joe thought that his best plan was to take very little notice of Sherwood, and so for two or three days he only nodded to him once, and on several occasions pretended not to see him ; but this behaviour was so totally foreign to his natural disposition that he felt it would be simply impossible to continue it. Whenever he met Sherwood he felt desperately inclined to burst out laughing, for as the days passed Ormsby's explosion began to seem more and more fantastic and absurd.

For a whole week neither Joe nor Ormsby ever mentioned Sherwood's name to each other, but this silence only made them think continually of him.

' Unless Joe mentions him, I'm blowed if I will,' Ormsby had said to himself.

' I'll hang out as long as he does,' Joe determined ; and so a sort of contest was begun—as silly a contest as was ever fought. And Joe won it, and promptly wished he had lost.

' A penny for your thoughts,' Ormsby said suddenly, when Joe was sitting in a chair and trying to keep awake until the bell rang for them to go to bed.

Joe jumped visibly, but he was not to be caught by such an ancient trick as this.

' If I had tried that old wheeze you would simply have slanged me,' he said.

' I'll tell you what you were thinking about, if you won't tell me.'

' Go on.'

' Will you bet I'm not right ? '

' No ; I'm not such an ass.'

' Sherwood ? '

Joe nodded.

'And so you are really a bigger idiot than I am,' Ormsby summed up.

'I'm not so sure about that; we've both been idiots,' Joe said.

'But you've been the bigger. Not that it makes any difference; only, if I hadn't stopped it, we might have gone on and on, until neither of us ever spoke at all.'

'I couldn't have gone on much longer.'

'What do you mean?' Ormsby asked.

'I couldn't have gone on pretending there isn't such a fellow as Sherwood. The more you try to wipe him out, the more you think about him. And I'm always running into him. Arkwright would say he's "on my nerves."'

'Well, I'll ask him in here to-morrow night,' Ormsby replied; and on the following evening Sherwood, looking rather suspicious, was escorted by Ormsby into the room.

Why Joe and Ormsby, after ignoring him for several days, should suddenly invite him into their room was a puzzle to Sherwood. Most of the fellows in the house had been kind to him, and had seemed rather sorry that he had no other new boys as companions; but after his first outburst of kindness Joe had conspicuously avoided him, while Arkwright had besieged Ormsby with requests to come to their room.

'Ormsby used to come to see me two or three times a day. I can't make it out,' Arkwright wailed incessantly; but Sherwood guessed that he was the cause of Ormsby's absence.

And so he accepted this invitation because he wanted to see more of Joe, even if he had at the same time to listen to Ormsby's efforts to be funny. In

two minutes, however, his suspicions vanished, though his surprise remained. Joe was just the same as he had been on the first night of the term. Without saying much or doing anything, he seemed to produce an atmosphere of friendliness; but Ormsby, instead of scoffing and jeering, had, as Sherwood described it to himself, 'turned on the other tap,' and was bubbling over with a desire to please. This change, Sherwood readily acknowledged, was all for the better; but what did it mean? Why had these fellows been so hostile, and why had they so suddenly altered? Somehow or other, he could believe that Joe was really glad to be friends with him; but although Ormsby was much the more effusive of the two, it was difficult to swallow all that he said. And, indeed, with the best intentions, Ormsby overplayed his part, and Joe instinctively knew that he was overplaying it, and was very embarrassed when Sherwood on the smallest opportunity turned from Ormsby to him. Chiefly, however, Joe was sorry for Ormsby, because he was playing the game for all he was worth, and somehow or other he seemed to be playing it before a fellow who suspected that it was a game.

From that evening Sherwood was frequently asked to come and see Ormsby and Joe, but Arkwright was never included in these invitations.

'It's a bit rough on the Infant,' Joe said more than once. 'He's not got a friend in the place except Sherwood, and we bag him.'

'The Infant makes me sick. He's always whining about his blooming inside; he's simply hopeless.'

'He thinks you are the finest thing ever hatched,' Joe said; but Ormsby would not even look at this bait.

'He can think what he jolly well pleases. He's

a nuisance, and the only thing to do with a nuisance is to remove it.'

'Poor wretch, he'll bolt or something. If you won't look after him, I suppose I must; but he really belongs to you.'

'Then I'll make you a present of him; but I don't see why Sherwood can't stick some sense into him,' Ormsby replied.

'The Infant gives himself airs, and says Sherwood is "only a new fellow."'

'If I catch the silly little ass spreading himself like that, I shall kick him. A worm might as well try to beat a drum,' Ormsby returned, and made a futile attempt to whistle the National Anthem.

Without doubt Ormsby's temper had not been improved by the strain of trying to conquer his dislike of Sherwood; but Joe was so pleased with him for making such a determined effort, that he was not greatly troubled by the inconvenience it caused. The chief bother was that after Ormsby had been explosively irritable, he almost invariably apologized to Joe; and when the latter tried to nip these apologies in the bud, Ormsby turned on him again and declared that any decent fellow would accept an apology.

'Then I ought to be a most awfully decent fellow, for I've accepted hundreds,' Joe retorted at last.

'I don't believe you've any more feeling than a frog,' Ormsby replied, and then added that he did not mean what he had said.

It is true that Ormsby sometimes seemed to forget all about Sherwood, and was just as gay and reckless as he had ever been; but, all the same, Joe had a good deal to put up with, and his patience might not have been so enduring had he not confidently expected

that Ormsby would soon be laughing at his own prophecies.

For a month or more Joe hugged this hope, and drew great comfort from it ; but as the term went on, it became perfectly certain to even the most determinedly short-sighted observers that although Ormsby and Sherwood might be friends, they were also destined in one way to be rivals.

From the very beginning of the term Joe had been told that he had got to keep wicket, and after one orgy of saying that he was absolutely no use he had remembered his father, and had decided that it was idiotic of him to draw Palmer's attention to a thing that would soon be obvious to everybody. 'I'm going,' he said to Ormsby, 'to put my back into this wicket-keeping business, and when I get the boot no one will be able to say that I haven't had a shot at it.'

Even Ormsby could not say that Joe was a born wicket-keeper, but he did assure him that eventually he might become a very useful one. The Pillings and Pinders and Blackhams of the cricket world have, however, known by instinct what Joe had to try and learn by practice. Courage he had in abundance. 'If,' Max said, when he was watching him, 'he can't stop the ball with his hands, he just puts his body in the way.' Joe, in short, endeavoured to make up for his lack of skill by his pluck, but the fact that he thought more of keeping down byes than of stumping people proved that he was not really a wicket-keeper. Nevertheless, he was not so great a failure as the other boys who were tried instead of him, and his place in the First House Eleven was soon regarded as a certainty.

'It begins to look,' he admitted to Ormsby, 'as if I am going to get my colours ; but it's a bit of terrific

luck that I've stumbled on what Max calls "a lean year of wicket-keepers."'

'Anyhow, you are better than anyone else, and I haven't heard a single fellow grouching because you're kept at the job,' Ormsby told him.

'I shall grouse if you don't get your colours. Except Armitage and Temperley, we haven't got a bowler on the side,' Joe told him.

But Ormsby's only reply was a grunt, for, although he had been bowling well and getting a lot of wickets, Sherwood had been equally successful.

At the beginning of the term Ormsby's bowling in junior games had made quite a sensation in Max's. Slow left-hand, with a high action, he had the knack of bowling a ball that sometimes seemed to sail through the air and sometimes quite obviously swerved. Palmer and Armitage, who went from the School Eleven nets to watch him, put his successes down to 'a deceptive flight,' and considered that the Second House Challenge Cup was as good as won. For a fortnight or so on sticky wickets, Ormsby passed on from success to success; and then on an afternoon when he was prevented from playing, Sherwood was put on to bowl, and Palmer was told afterwards by the Junior Captain that even a better bowler than Ormsby had been discovered.

To this Palmer had replied with a shrug of his shoulders, and Armitage, who had overheard the eulogies of Sherwood, merely said 'Rats!'

'If he isn't better, he's just as good. He's left-handed, too, with just the same action, only he's a little bit faster; and I don't believe he would be rattled if he was hit for thirty in an over,' the discoverer of Sherwood retorted.

On the next evening, when Max's juniors were playing Bonham's, Armitage and Palmer saw Ormsby

bowling at one end and Sherwood at the other, and also watched Bonham's Eleven dismissed for sixteen runs, Ormsby taking five wickets for seven runs and Sherwood five for nine.

'They are as alike as two peas,' Palmer said.

'The only difference I can see is that Ormsby has dark hair and the other chap fair. We shall have to put one of them in the First Eleven,' Armitage replied.

'Which of them?' Palmer asked.

'There's heaps of time to decide that, but it's no use to have two fellows who bowl exactly alike in one Eleven. Either of those chaps can win the Second House Cup on his head.'

'One of them may fall off,' Palmer remarked, almost as if he wished the problem might solve itself in that way.

Neither Ormsby nor Sherwood, however, showed any signs of falling off; but the former had one advantage over his rival, and that was that he was the better 'field' of the two. A regular duel had begun between them, and Ormsby naturally forgot that he had begun the term by saying that he did not want to get his First Eleven colours. Where Joe went he had now resolved to go; and though he praised Sherwood's bowling in and out of season, he had a secret feeling that it was just like this fellow to appear suddenly and upset things. Without him, everything would have been 'simply ripping.' As it was, Ormsby had to profess a terrific friendship for Sherwood, so that everyone in the house should not guess how cordially he hated him.

Sherwood meanwhile quietly accepted what the gods had given him, and managed to squash his feelings of distrust of Ormsby. 'No fellow who did not mean it could be half so friendly,' he said to himself,

‘and it’s all the more decent, because I can’t help bowling rather like him.’ Honestly, however, he considered that Ormsby knew far more about bowling than he did, and so the duel which the house was watching with interest did not really trouble him. His eyes, in fact, were not set upon the First Eleven, but upon the Second, and he did not consider that he was bound even to get into the latter unless he succeeded in improving his fielding and catching. So, on one half-holiday when a school-match had finished abruptly, he met Joe in the house, and asked him if he would take a bat and ball into Max’s field and hit him some catches.

‘Rather,’ Joe answered, and for half an hour exercised both himself and Sherwood. Not a suspicion that Ormsby, who had gone to Mother Bloomfield’s, could disapprove of this performance ever crossed Joe’s mind; but just as he was finishing, Ormsby came into the field to bowl at a net, and when he saw what Joe and Sherwood were doing he circled round them and reached the net without speaking.

And on that same evening Joe discovered that he was considered to have committed the lowest form of treason.

‘My only chance,’ Ormsby stormed, ‘of beating that fellow and getting into the House Eleven with you is that he simply can’t catch for apples; and then you go and coach him up, and try to knock all the chance I have got on the head. If another wicket-keeper dropped through Max’s roof, I’d try to cut his fingers for him, while you slip off and hit catches for Sherwood when you think I’m not looking.’

‘That’s a beastly lie,’ Joe replied. ‘I never thought anything about you——’

‘Of course you didn’t; you never do,’ Ormsby interrupted.

‘Oh, shut up for half a minute, and give me a chance. What I meant was that I didn’t slip off, as you call it, and it’s simply rotten of you to say that I was coaching Sherwood up because I want to get him into the Eleven instead of you. I was hitting catches because he asked me to, and because I had nothing else to do.’

‘Directly I’m out of the way you are always clinging on to him, or the other way about,’ Ormsby complained.

Whereupon Joe kicked the waste-paper basket from one end of the room to the other, and decided to tell Ormsby precisely what he thought.

‘I don’t really care a brass farthing about the fellow, and if there is any “clinging,” I don’t do it,’ he said. ‘But if you keep on slating him, you’ll make me like him. It’s all the most utter rot, and I’m sick to death of it. Until you get rid of this humbug of——’

‘It isn’t humbug; it’s a presentiment—a much fatter thing,’ Ormsby interrupted.

‘Whatever its blessed name is it’s all rot, and until you forget it I’d rather live with a roomful of Barbary apes than with you.’

‘Wouldn’t ordinary apes do?’ Ormsby asked; but Joe took no notice of him.

‘I believe you are so stuck on your foresight, or whatever you call it, that you will be sick to death if Sherwood doesn’t mess things up. You’re like one of those fellows who prophesy the end of the world, and wouldn’t they look precious asses if they happened to prophesy right! They’d jolly well be in the bag, and serve them right too.’

As Joe relieved and revealed his feelings he marched up and down the small room, and kicked at things as he marched; and when he had finished he sat down abruptly and began to rub his toes.

'I should think you have broken a toe or two,' Ormsby said.

'They've been having a lot better time than my fingers. It's about time they got hurt,' Joe replied savagely.

And then Ormsby complicated the situation still more by breaking into a tempestuous roar of laughter.

'I'm blessed if I see what there is to yell about. Can't a fellow rub his own toes?' Joe asked.

But Ormsby still continued to laugh.

'Oh, you're cracked,' Joe told him.

'I'm not; but I've never seen you in a real rage before. You're rather like Max——'

'I'm blowed if I am.'

'I'm sorry I was such an ass,' Ormsby spluttered, 'but it was almost worth it.'

'Worth what?'

'Why, seeing you sort of pumped up. You were funnier than a circus.'

'I hate circuses; they smell,' Joe said; and Ormsby had to work very hard before he restored him to his normal state of mind.

The atmosphere, however, had been cleared by Joe's unexpected explosion, and for a very long time he and Ormsby never had another quarrel nor even a disagreement. To his unqualified delight, Ormsby was put into the First House Eleven, and having got what he wanted, his jealousy of Sherwood seemed to have been put permanently to rest.

Max's won both the First and Second Eleven cricket cups, and in the excitement of anticipating success and of achieving it Joe found it very difficult to do much more work for Mr. Ussher. 'At any rate,' he told himself, 'I do more than Ormsby.' But whenever he thought of his promise to his mother, uneasy prickings invaded his conscience. Before the exams.

both he and Ormsby crammed terrifically for several nights, but in the end Joe was only tenth in the class and Ormsby twelfth.

‘It’s good enough,’ Ormsby said. ‘We shall both of us get our remove next term.’

But Joe doubted whether it was ‘good enough’ to satisfy his mother, who at his request had saved him from a holiday tutor. And when he saw his report, and Mr. Ussher’s brief remark, ‘Takes no trouble and gives none,’ he blushed hotly with shame. As far as work was concerned, Mr. Ussher had literally wiped him out and treated him as unworthy of consideration.

Again he vowed that he would work ‘like anything’ during the following term, but on this occasion he did not offer any promises to his mother, nor did she ask for any.

CHAPTER V

CHANGE AND DECAY

IN Mr. Rumbold's opinion a year at Granby had made a different boy of Joe. 'Most of the rubbish,' he said to his wife, 'has been knocked out of him, and he no longer moons about as if he is looking for something which he hasn't an outside chance of finding.' And it was well that Joe had succeeded in satisfying his father, for the latter was engaged during that August in cutting, as it were, a set of false teeth, and was often more petulant than a teething baby. Even Bingo, who had got into the Cambridge Eleven without the smallest difficulty, and had returned to Maiden Croft with a numerous and lurid collection of new colours, did not escape paternal criticism.

'You seem to have about three ties for every day of the week, and enough blazers to cover a cricket pitch. Who, I should like to know, pays for all this trumpery?' Mr. Rumbold asked when Bingo came down to breakfast with the cerise, vermilion, and magenta scarf of 'The Macedonians' round his neck.

Although a little surprised and disgusted by such an attack as this, Bingo refrained from replying to it. 'The poor old Governor,' he and Flip had decided, 'is out of sorts because he's always getting bunkered by his teeth. What he wants is time.'

But Mr. Rumbold's complaint, in spite of his sons'

decision, was really a strong and sudden desire to exercise his authority over his family. 'They treat the place as if it is an hotel, and they bring Tom, Dick, and Harry here without telling me, and I have to pay the bill. Every year they become more casual and less grateful for what I've done for them; they would ruin a Rothschild,' he had complained a few days before to Mrs. Rumbold, and she had found herself in the unusual position of having to defend her elder sons against their father's anger. Vaguely she wondered if the Rumbold business was not partly responsible for her husband's abrupt awakening.

These false teeth had, of course, assumed an enormous importance in the daily life of Maiden Croft, for their owner was not a man who could suffer any inconvenience in silence. So often, in fact, did his family find themselves talking about these newcomers that Joe christened them 'Archibald,' and by that name they were familiarly known.

Nevertheless the unwelcome presence of Archibald could not, Mrs. Rumbold considered, be held accountable for all the grumblings that she had heard. Money or the lack of it must, she thought, be the primary cause of the trouble, but she did not dare to suggest that Maiden Croft might be managed on more economical lines. Such a suggestion as that would, she knew, simply raise a storm without clearing the atmosphere. At the very beginning of her married life she had been told that she was not to bother about money, and although she had once or twice struggled to take some part in the financial arrangements of the house, her husband had shown a most outspoken contempt for feminine financiers, and had practically forbidden her to take part in affairs that were beyond her understanding.

So through all the years she had never concerned

herself about money, except often to think that it would have been better for her sons if they had been compelled to learn the value of it. As long as they pleased their father every whim had been gratified, and if they had been born with a sense of economy it had become atrophied by disuse.

Although Bingo had weathered his father's first attack by not replying to it, he put it down so completely to the irritating Archibald, that he continued to upset the colour scheme of the Maiden Croft dining-room with its gaudy raiment.

'Why can't you dress properly for lunch? It is an insult to your mother to wear such a preposterous blazer as that at a meal,' Mr. Rumbold said to him some days after the first attack.

It was necessary, Bingo considered, to be very patient with his father at this trying time, to humour him as much as possible, and not to take any notice when Archibald was in power.

'Do you mind, mother?' he asked very quietly.

'The colours scarcely seem to blend, Bingo,' she answered.

'What are the colours?' Mr. Rumbold asked.

'Well,' Bingo said, looking at his sleeve, 'they are a sort of red and a bit of——'

'I mean what club do they belong to?' Mr. Rumbold interrupted.

'Oh, "The Macedonians,"' Bingo replied, as if that settled the matter.

'And who in the name of Fate are "The Macedonians," and if you want to dress yourself up like a banjo-fellow on Margate sands, why can't you wear the colours of some respectable club like the Free Foresters?' Mr. Rumbold said incoherently, and glared at the coat of many hues.

Bingo looked across the table and winked gaily at

Flip. The wink was intended to convey that Archibald was having a high old time.

'The Macedonians are a dining-club at Cambridge, only eleven members,' he said.

'I've never heard of it. When was it started, and who chose that abominable blazer?' Mr. Rumbold asked.

'We started it last term. We dine once a week, and I'm President.'

'Then the sooner you resign the better; it is a scandalous piece of ridiculous extravagance. You have about twenty blazers already, and you aren't content with them, but must go and get another lot of colours, which mean nothing except that you over-eat yourself once a week. I won't have it.'

Archibald was really running riot this afternoon, Bingo thought, but he still determined to be patient. The next attack, however, upset both him and Joe.

'Just look at the difference between you and Joe,' Mr. Rumbold continued. 'Any self-respecting horse would shy if he met you, while Joe is dressed in respectable grey flannels. If the King walked in to lunch, Joe would be fit to be seen, but you would have to rush out of the room.'

'I didn't know that you were expecting the King to lunch; he doesn't come often,' Bingo replied with a grin.

'That's got nothing to do with it, for you knew that your mother was lunching at home, and you ought to be dressed properly. Will you now oblige me by going upstairs and putting on a less offensive coat.'

For a moment there was absolute silence in the room. Joe, with a spoonful of fruit salad in his hand, held it suspended between his mouth and his plate, while

he looked to see what Bingo was going to do. In the old days Joe had often been sent from meals on some flimsy pretext or another, but to find someone else being treated in such a way was novel enough to be exciting. Apparently Bingo's method of dealing with his father's order was going to be a pretence that he had not heard it, for he remained stolidly in his chair. Indeed, so white with anger had he become, that Joe wondered whether he was capable of moving.

'Kindly do as I ask you,' Mr. Rumbold said in a voice of strained politeness from the top of the table.

And then Mrs. Rumbold came to Bingo's rescue.

'As we have nearly finished it seems rather unnecessary for Bingo to change his clothes now. But please don't wear that coat any more at meals,' she said, and looked beseechingly at the Macedonian.

'All right, mother,' Bingo managed to mutter; but he was far too angry to make even a pretence of eating, and with an apology, which he cast forth for anyone to pick up who wanted it, he soon afterwards left the room.

'You spoil them; you spoil the whole lot of them—spoil them disgracefully,' Mr. Rumbold said to his wife when Flip and Joe had also vanished.

'I am afraid they have become accustomed to being spoiled,' she replied. 'And we are as much to blame as they are.'

At this Mr. Rumbold looked angrily at her. What he had said was that *she* had spoiled them, and he had no intention of having to share the blame.

'You must stop spoiling them,' he said.

'Isn't it a little difficult to stop suddenly when it has been going on for years? And isn't it a little hard on them?'

'No, not in the least; it will be good for them.'

They are all outrageously extravagant ; even Joe's bills for this term are pounds more than they ought to be. He has had three straw hats.'

'He told me about them,' said Mrs. Rumbold. 'A large boy called Street sat on one, Joe upset a bottle of red ink over another, and the third he has now. But I will speak to him.'

'I shall speak to the whole lot of them, and at that moment a servant came into the room with a telegram. Mr. Rumbold tore open the envelope, but as he read the telegram his face lost all signs of stress and storm.

'No answer,' he said to the servant, and then, turning to his wife, he added : 'Read that.'

'Self, 105 not ; Jumpy, 71 not. Lunch.—PADS,' Mrs. Rumbold read.

'How splendid,' she exclaimed, and never, she thought, had the successes of her sons come at a more opportune time.

'Splendid, I should think it is ! And against Lancashire, too, and they're about the best bowling side in England. That will teach these old county fogies not to threaten to leave Jumpy out, because some of these schoolmasters are having their holidays. I shall send a long wire to Pads and Jumpy this evening. I shouldn't wonder if both of them make a couple of a hundred.'

For the time being, at any rate, both Archibald and the necessity for economy were forgotten. Mr. Rumbold poured out another glass of sherry, and broke forth into pæans of delight over Pad's telegram. Very frequently Mrs. Rumbold had been a listener to similar ebullitions, but never before had she received them with so much understanding and sympathy. This cricket, which she had come to think a most wonderful way of wasting time, was, after

all, of real service, if it could, as if by magic, change her husband from a scowling autocrat into an enthusiastic schoolboy. Secretly she blessed Pads for making a hundred against Lancashire, and for wiring to say so.

The sudden attack upon Bingo at luncheon had shaken her more than she had yet realized, for he had always been the very apple of his father's eye. If Bingo was to be ordered from the room, there was no knowing what sort of explosion might happen next. She wanted time to think over the events of that afternoon, and when she found Joe sitting in her room, she told him to go and tell Flip and Bingo what Pads and Jumpy were doing.

'I'll be back in a jiffy,' Joe replied.

'I think I shall lie down for half an hour,' she said.

'You aren't ill, are you?' he asked.

'No, only a little tired, Joe.'

'Why did father suddenly get into such a frightful bait at lunch?'

Mrs. Rumbold shook her head; but he still lingered.

'I'm pretty used to being gone for, but Bingo isn't. I expect it's all old Archibald,' he said, and reluctantly went off to find Flip and Bingo. He was very glad that Pads and Jumpy were making such a lot of runs, but he was not as surprised by their success as he was by his father's attack upon Bingo. It was, therefore, a little disappointing to be sent off with a message when he wanted to talk about this strange event. Moreover, he did not expect that Bingo, at any rate, would have yet recovered his temper.

Directly after lunch Bingo had taken off the Macedonian blazer, and had crumpled it up and thrown it into a corner of his bedroom. Then he

pulled out as many coats as he could lay hands on, and, having scattered them in all directions, he remembered that he had once possessed a black-and-white check suit that had caused some sorrow in the family. Being unable to find it, he rang the bell and Jenny appeared.

'Where's my coat; that black-and-white check thing?' he asked.

'Gracious, what a mess! Whatever have you been doing, Mr. Bingo?' Jenny said.

'I want that coat.'

'Your mother gave it away for the last bazaar; you'd outgrown it.'

Whereupon Bingo swore, and Jenny at once turned round and left him.

'That old woman gives herself as many airs as a peacock,' he muttered to himself, and seizing the coat that was nearest to him, he put it on and went into the garden. There he found Flip lying in a deck-chair and looking as if he was on the point of going to sleep.

'When the Governor gets false teeth he ought to go off for a rest-cure, and take Archibald with him,' Bingo said, and spread himself out in the next chair to Flip's. Quite badly he wanted a sympathetic audience, but from the look of things he suspected that instead of having his grievances listened to, he would soon be listening to Flip's snores.

'You'll get it next,' he informed his somnolent brother.

'Not likely,' Flip grunted.

'The Governor's very nearly dotty. It's a precious good thing he's started this new dodge of having no servants to wait at lunch. What on earth would they have thought of it?'

'They might have liked it,' Flip said.

‘Anyhow, it is pretty rough being slated like that before such a kid as Joe. I shall jolly well thrash Joe if he says anything about it.’

‘Joe had the time of his life, and no wonder; he’s been slated enough, and no one kicked up a fuss about it,’ Flip replied, and went most provokingly to sleep.

For some time Bingo sat and pondered over the way in which he had been treated, and the more he thought of it the more aggrieved did he feel. His father, no doubt, would ultimately say that he was sorry, but whether such an insult could be wiped out by any apology was more than Bingo could decide. Finally, he resolved to show that he resented being spoken to as if he was Joe or a baby, and visions of the impression he would create by his dignified coldness (which some people would have called sulkiness) passed through his mind. And then, having fixed upon his future line of conduct, he stretched himself out and closed his eyes. No sooner, however, was he beginning to forget his troubles than he heard Joe shouting behind him.

‘I say,’ Joe began from some fifty yards away, ‘Pads has made 105 and Jumpy 71, and both of them were not out at lunch. Father’s had a wire.’

Having delivered his message, Joe drew himself up in front of Bingo, and regarded him with palpable curiosity.

‘That’s up against Lancashire,’ Flip said, and rubbed his eyes.

‘It must be an absolutely plumb wicket if Jumpy makes runs,’ Bingo declared, and told Joe to ‘hook it.’

But Joe remained where he was, and continued to stare at his brother.

'I told you to make yourself scarce,' Bingo informed him.

'Why can't you fellows come and do something instead of sleeping all the afternoon; you are a brace of slackers,' he replied, and Flip guffawed with laughter.

'I'll kick you round the lawn unless you clear quick,' Bingo said.

'I thought you would be a bit baity,' Joe returned, and walked slowly away.

'That kid's coming on,' Flip said, as he watched Joe take a cricket-ball from his pocket and bowl it across the lawn.

'He's getting a lot too cheeky, and wants a jolly good whacking,' was the reply.

Unknown to—or at any rate unnoticed by—Mr. and Mrs. Rumbold, a battle between Joe and his outraged brother began on that evening, and lasted, with only very brief truces, to the end of the holidays. But although Bingo gave more than he got in this warfare, Joe proved conclusively that what Flip had said about him was true. He was no longer an outsider in his own home, and the feeling that he had at length gained a position for himself made him determined to maintain it. Sometimes, it is true, he became supremely tired of the contest, and negotiated for peace; but no peace was possible while he was only prepared to go half-way towards it, and Bingo expected him to grovel and come the whole of the way.

If Joe gained something in self-confidence and determination during those holidays, he lost also for a time some of the qualities that had made his mother so hopeful for him. The process of becoming a Rumbold was in full swing, and his earlier ambitions and tastes seemed to drop from him like dead leaves

from a tree. In justice to him, it must be said that his mother was always so busy during this time of change that he could get but little of her companionship. Whenever he went to her room, either his father was there, or she was writing letters, or someone was coming to see her in a few minutes. Joe had to put up with scraps and bits of time snatched from a busy day, instead of being always welcomed ; and although his mother treated him with the warmest affection, he gradually came to the conclusion that it was hopeless for him to invade her room.

‘ I don’t believe mother sees that I am growing up,’ he once complained to Jenny.

‘ Don’t you get such ideas into your head,’ she had answered. ‘ Your mother worships you far more than any boy deserves ; but she’s busy just now.’

‘ What’s she busy at ? I can never see her alone, except for about two minutes at night.’

‘ She’s busy,’ Jenny replied, and pursed her lips. You might, Joe knew, as well try to get information out of a sphinx as out of Mrs. Jennifer when she didn’t mean to give it. Yet that there was some mystery in Maiden Croft Joe felt certain, and it seemed to him to cast a kind of gloom over the place. His father, after the attack on Bingo, had shown no further signs of anger ; but somehow or other he had changed, and Joe noticed the change and in a sense regretted it ; for after living for years under extremely critical eyes, it worried him to find that his father had suddenly become so unobservant. Something undoubtedly was the matter, but no one would tell him what it was. Even Pads, when appealed to, told him that he had better not bother his head about other people’s business.

‘ But do you *know* what it is ? ’ Joe had persisted.

‘ No ; but father gave Flip and Jumpy and Bingo

and me a jaw about being extravagant the other night.'

'Was it a good jaw?'

'No; he didn't really seem to care much what happens,' Pads replied.

'That's it,' Joe agreed; 'he seems sort of slack. Isn't there a patent food or something we could give him to buck him up a bit?'

At this Pads laughed, for the idea of holding his father down while Joe dosed him with patent medicines seemed the very height of absurdity.

'You'd better spend your time in bucking up at Granby; that will please the Governor as much as anything,' he replied; and Joe thought over this advice, and decided that it was 'sound stuff.'

So he returned to school bent on pleasing his father, and that meant, he knew, that games must count before work, and that as long as he was successful at the one, the other was not in the least important. His father had got to be 'bucked up,' and Pads had said that he could do it. That, for the time being, was enough for Joe.

When, however, he had once more settled down at Granby, he quickly discovered that Maiden Croft was not the only place that seemed to have a cloud cast over it. Max's house, which had been filled to overflowing for ten years, was now seven short of its full numbers, and some of the other houses were in even a more depleted condition than Max's. The school as a whole was over sixty boys short of its maximum.

For some time there had been signs that Granby was on the wane, but no one except Mr. Boyd and a few other masters, who were promptly called 'cranks,' had been alarmed. 'Schools,' the optimists had declared, 'have their ups and downs;

we shall be refusing boys by the dozen in a year or two.' The Governors of Granby had apparently subscribed to this view, for they had remained aloft and aloof, and had persuaded themselves that nothing serious could really happen to a school of such an old and established reputation as Granby.

'Perhaps,' one of them had said to a fellow-Governor whom he had met in a club, 'Manning pays more attention to games than is altogether wise in this confounded fidgety and inquisitive age. You might give him a hint if you see him.'

To hint anything to Dr. Manning was, however, bound to be as ineffectual as to try and guide a mule by winking at it. He was a man of rooted ideas and prejudices; Granby—whatever anyone dared to say—turned out its boys as gentlemen and athletes. The British Empire had been built up and maintained by gentlemen and athletes, and so Granby was doing the best possible work in the best possible way. When Mr. Boyd told him that competition was getting keener every day, and that Granby's list of intellectual successes was getting smaller and smaller, he merely shrugged his shoulders and answered that they had eleven boys in the last Sandhurst list.

'It is practically impossible not to get into Sandhurst at present,' Boyd had answered.

'That just shows what the country is coming to,' Dr. Manning retorted.

There was no sense in trying to reason with such a Head as this, but Mr. Boyd had foreseen the decline of Granby, though he was far too fond of the school ever openly to prophesy its misfortunes, or to say, 'I told you so,' when they came.

And then, at the beginning of this Christmas term, William Rumbold's appointment to the editorship

of the *Daily Messenger* was announced in the Press, and almost immediately afterwards a series of articles, called 'The Failure of our Public Schools,' was begun in that paper.

It is probable that nearly every headmaster of every public school in the United Kingdom imagined that these articles were aimed directly at him, so trenchant and so full of inside knowledge were they; but in no school did they cause such profound indignation as at Granby. The boys read them, discussed them, laughed over bits of them, pounced on things that did not happen at Granby—on the whole, scorned the idea that such a hallowed institution as an old public school was capable of improvement.

But among the majority of the masters at Granby, the *Messenger* crusade was received with an anger that prevented sane criticism. William Rumbold was a renegade, a traitor, a snake in the grass who was trying to advertize his paper by venomous attacks on his old school, and by telling lies.

The article on the inadequate provision that public schools made for sweeping epidemics of illness was, Dr. Manning considered, so obviously directed at Granby that, without consulting anyone, he answered it in a long letter that was as unconvincing as it was pompous. The vast majority, however, of headmasters were not to be trapped as easily as Dr. Manning had been; their refuges against the onslaught were silence, and a hope that public interest would soon be switched off to some new scare.

'The public don't really care about education,' one of them said, 'and the *Messenger* will soon find out that these articles are falling flat.'

But the *Messenger* went gaily on with its crusade until Max, at last goaded beyond endurance, swal-

lowed large quantities of pride, and wrote to William Rumbold.

‘I appeal to you as an old Granbeian,’ he wrote, ‘to cease from provoking public opinion in this unnecessary manner. No good can possibly come from the attack you are making, and you are playing directly into the hands of those who have a constitutional dislike for the old-established schools, and who want nothing so much as to see them ruined.’

To this request Max received a courteous, but distinct, refusal.

‘It is because I am a supporter of public schools, and do not wish to see them ruined, that,’ William Rumbold answered, ‘I am allowing these articles to be published. I agree entirely with you that the parents are certainly as much to blame as anybody. But as it is inconceivable that parents will form themselves into a Union and insist that their children shall be properly educated, I can think of no better way to awaken them to their responsibility than to show them what they are paying for, and what they are getting for their money, and then leave individuals to make a stir in the matter. I notice that you put most of the blame for the unsatisfactory results of a public-school education upon the teaching at private schools, but after most careful inquiries I find myself unable to agree with you. I am, indeed, convinced that the majority of private schoolmasters are thoroughly enlightened in their methods of teaching, and also thoroughly disgusted when their methods are upset by the necessity of cramming boys for ridiculously difficult scholarship examinations. Granby, I am glad to say, is not one of the sinners in this respect (for I hold that it is a sin to tire out a boy’s brain before he is fourteen); but I must in honesty add that Granby

seems to me to have gone to the other extreme, and to be almost totally neglecting scholarship work of any kind.'

This letter did nothing to appease Max, but he found some relief in saying that when a man first of all pitched into cramming, and then turned round and pitched into a school for not cramming, he was more fitted to occupy a padded cell than an editorial chair.

From that day Max banished the *Daily Messenger* from his house, and rigorously tried to avoid what he called 'the pestilential rag.' Ormsby soon discovered that even to mention the *Messenger* in Max's hearing was a safe 'draw,' and so, when he felt that a little excitement was needed at meals, he referred to that paper, and invariably succeeded in attracting Max's angry attention.

The final article, however, contained such a number of revelations that, if Max had been stone-deaf, he would have had but small chance of escaping from them. Without claiming to be completely correct, the *Messenger* concluded its crusade by publishing a list of successes gained in competitive examinations during the last four years by all the leading public schools, and in this list it is enough to say that Granby occupied an extraordinarily humble position.

'Could any loyal Granbeian,' Max asked his wife, 'allow such a thing to be printed? Besides,' he added, 'it isn't true; the Head has already put his finger on two omissions.'

'What are they?' Mrs. Max asked.

'One of them is Palmer; they've given him an exhibition at Queen's. He's up there now.'

Mrs. Max smiled quietly. She thought that she knew why that exhibition had been given, and the reason did not help her to believe—as she wished

to believe—in the inaccuracy of the *Messenger* list.

Whatever else William Rumbold's crusade may have done, it definitely split the masters of Granby into two parties. The one party, led by Mr. Boyd, declared openly that it was more than time for them to put their house in order; the other party, with Max as its leader, put their backs against the wall, and said that Granby was above and beyond the scurrilous attacks of the daily Press. For a time Dr. Manning hovered between the hostile camps. Perhaps even more than the average schoolmaster he detested to be criticized, but, unlike most of the men in his profession, criticism alarmed him. Expediency always appealed to him with irresistible force. He wanted to see Granby overflowing with boys because he was headmaster of it; but he was incapable of looking into the future, and he hated the idea of reforms, because they would upset the stately orderliness of his daily life. Routine had swamped his imagination; Granby had always been one of the leading public schools, and always must be. There was no more loyal set of men in the world than the Old Granbeians, and they would always send their sons to Granby.

It came as a shock to him to hear that the Old Granbeian Football Club had been broken up for want of members, and that the Granbeian Mission in East London was suffering from both want of funds and personal service. But his faith survived these blows, and eventually he told Mr. Boyd and his supporters that William Rumbold's effigy ought to be burnt in the school grounds on the Fifth of November.

By some means Ormsby got to hear what the Man had said, and in consequence William Rumbold

(stuffed with straw) was burnt near the big school-gates. Moreover, Joe was chosen to set him alight, and nearly the whole school watched him burning. But the only results of this conflagration were that Ormsby found out how painful it was to carry out the Man's wishes, and that Joe suffered with him.

'A grave dereliction of duty,' the Head called it, and on the following Sunday preached a sermon upon the dangers of insubordinate conduct.

The opinion, however, in Max's was that Ormsby and Joe were 'two rare sportsmen,' and the way in which they had built William Rumbold (and stuffed him) without being discovered, both added to their popularity and brought them ceaseless invitations to commit another exciting breach of the rules.

But the fact must be added that Ormsby and Joe were not as clever as they were thought to be; for Max, exploring the underground rooms of his house on the night of November 4, had found William Rumbold propped rather drunkenly against a wall, and had made up his mind not to mention this discovery to anyone except his wife.

'It's what he deserves. I should like to light him myself,' he said.

'Where are they going to burn him?' Mrs. Max asked.

'I don't know. I shall have to see that they don't set the house on fire.'

'Won't the Head be furiously angry?'

'He advised it himself.'

'But he is so—so wobbly.'

'He has wobbled the right way at last,' Max said.

'I hope Joe won't get into trouble; I suppose he and Ormsby did it.'

'No need to bother about Joe; he's getting on splendidly this term,' Max replied.

CHAPTER VI

MAX REGNANT

As far as Max was concerned, the ultimate outcome of the *Messenger's* crusade was to increase his zeal for physical fitness. 'If,' he said to Mrs. Max, 'a boy has not got brains, no system of education ever devised will provide him with them; but as long as he has got a body, you can help him to develop it.' It seemed to Mrs. Max that her husband had probably missed his vocation in life; he ought, she considered, to have been a professor of physical culture instead of a schoolmaster. But she was so relieved to see him casting off the bugbear which William Rumbold had created, that she refrained from retorting that he had failed to see what the articles in the *Messenger* had been aiming at. They, in her opinion, had put forward a strong plea on behalf of the boy with average brains, and had stated flatly that many schools sent him out into the world with a smattering of knowledge that was useless to him, and with his tastes for everything except games wickedly neglected. Like most sweeping assertions, this one was not wholly true; but Mrs. Max knew that there was an element of truth in it. Her husband's declaration that men knew what their sons were going to get at Granby, and that consequently it was their look-out if they sent them there, was

right as far as it went, but it did not go far enough. Mrs. Max remembered that she had been compelled to give up a greengrocer, because he insisted on providing her with turnip tops when she had ordered Brussels sprouts.

The future of Granby did not appear to her to be very hopeful ; but whatever troubles were in store, the only thing that she could do, either now or then, was to try to restrain the impetuosity of her husband. For the present he was taking a grim delight in saying, ' If the old place is going to pieces, they will find most of the school challenge cups in this house.' Not for a moment did he imagine that Granby was going to pieces, but the fact that his house was not full gave him some sleepless nights, and provoked a most intense determination that it should not lose anything of its athletic lustre because it happened to be rather short of boys. Palmer, West, and Rose had left, but Armitage remained, and after a consultation with him Max summoned all his boys to the hall, and addressed them in a stirring speech. The gist of what he said was that, at all costs, against attacks from without (tremendous cheers) and from within (cheers), the honour and reputation of Max's must be upheld.

His boys left the hall with a vehement desire to serve, and to serve *him*. He had aroused their individual feelings, and had knit them, at any rate for the time being, into a corporate body, eager for nothing so much as to see Max's triumphing over difficulties.

Into the maelstrom of athletic energy that followed, both Joe and Ormsby took a large and willing part. Max had persuaded them that there was something they could do, and Joe at the same time remembered that whatever successes he could gain

in the athletic world were likely (so Pads had said) to 'buck up' his father. It was a slice of luck, Joe thought, to be able to kill two birds with one stone; but he did not recognize that in trying to please Max and his father he was also pleasing himself, and he forgot almost entirely that he had promised to 'work like anything.' That promise, as far as he thought of it at all, seemed to belong to the dim and distant past, to a time when things were very different from what they had now become—and not half so exciting. Max's had to be saved from losing an atom of the glory it had been accustomed to, and on which it lived; his father had to be 'bucked up'; and his mother, who understood everything, would surely see that 'no fellow could do about half a dozen things with all his might at the same time.'

Joe's school work rapidly became a very secondary consideration, and after he had been moved into a room by himself, he often burst in upon Ormsby, and was surprised to find him working. Side by side, however, they moved up class by class through the school, Joe's natural ability for verses and proses making up in a large measure for the marks he lost by neglecting his translations and 'rep.' Additionally, he was always able to get a few marks extra for the French that he had learned as a child, and not yet forgotten; and when a master showed him how to do a sum, he could rattle off, with incredible speed, a lot of sums precisely like it.

It may be said of him that he continued to work in school, but never did a moment's more preparation than he could help. The hours in which he was supposed to be preparing his work he spent chiefly in reading novels, poetry (at which Ormsby laughed), and in scribbling bits of articles and stories, which

he generally had the courage to tear up. He did, however, battle for several nights with an account of the fight between Durdington and Glyde, as related to him by Mr. Tom Flood, and after he had wasted an enormous amount of paper, he at last succeeded in writing 'The End.' Then, without reading what he had written, he put it hastily in an envelope, which he covered with more stamps than its bulk demanded, and addressed it to the 'Editors of the *Granbeian*.'

A few days afterwards the editors sent for him, and he discovered that they were Mr. Anderson, his first-form master, and a sixth-form boy named Peel, whom Joe considered the most outrageous prig.

'We want things like yours,' Mr. Anderson said, 'and we hope you will go on writing. The *Granbeian* isn't intended to be merely a chronicle of games; we want to encourage boys to write for it.'

At this Joe blushed scarlet. Apparently his 'thing' was accepted, and that was a greater slice of luck than he had ever anticipated. It would make him 'one up' on Ormsby, whose 'Life of Max' was still in the chrysalis stage.

'Our object is to develop any literary talent we can find. Anyone who sends us things, however crude and unformed they may be, will receive our attention,' Peel remarked; and although Joe felt as if a bucket of cold water had suddenly been hurled over him, his trust in Mr. Anderson remained.

'Are you going to stick it in?' he asked him, and turned his back on Peel.

'Yes, if you are willing to have it slightly altered. Peel and I will do that for you.'

'Rather!' Joe said.

'You see,' Peel told him, 'the title, "A Jolly

Good Fight," is not literary enough for us. I have suggested to Mr. Anderson that it should be called "An Historic Battle." And your style wants supervision. You split your infinitives——'

Joe's face was such a study in astonishment that Mr. Anderson laughed out loud.

'To my certain knowledge, George Meredith split one infinitive,' he said.

'A slip, no doubt,' Peel remarked; and Mr. Anderson continued to laugh. To hear Meredith being mildly patronized by Peel was a compensation for the time that had to be spent with his co-editor.

'If George Meredith splits his infinitives—and I don't know exactly what you mean—I don't mind doing it,' Joe remarked.

'Have you read Meredith?' Peel asked.

'Most of his novels, and some of his poetry.'

'Oh,' Peel exclaimed; but as soon as he had recovered from the shock of finding a junior who had read more of Meredith than he had, he continued: 'You don't want to copy a man's faults.'

'I have never seen more than one split infinitive in Meredith,' Mr. Anderson interrupted.

'You don't, in fact, want to copy any man. Stevenson I can recommend——'

'I've read "Treasure Island" two or three times,' Joe said.

'Then you might have learned more from it than you seem to have,' Peel said impatiently. 'You use three adjectives, all of which mean the same thing, and each one of which is more unnecessary than the other.'

'I don't see how they can be if they all mean the same thing,' Joe replied, and then added quickly: 'but it's awfully decent of Mr. Anderson and you to bother about my stuff. Please unsplit anything

you like, and cut out all my adjectives. I remember I did simply pour them out. I heard a Canon preach here one Sunday last term, and he simply stuck about six adjectives to every noun, and I thought it sounded all right.'

Peel shrugged his shoulders. 'The dear Canon is renowned for his adjectives,' he said, 'but I am sure that even he would never write "to gaily sing," and "to rapidly march."'

'Oh, that's it!' Joe exclaimed; 'I see now.'

'Never mind, Rumbold; there are worse things in writing than to split infinitives. We will edit your fight for you.'

In the very next number of the *Granbeian* Joe read what Mr. Anderson, Peel, and he had written, and also heard what his friends thought of it. The general opinion was that to fill three pages of the magazine with such 'undiluted tosh' just showed what an ass Peel was. 'Whoever,' Battersby asked in the dormitory, 'wants to know what a lot of Durdington rustics did?'

'It wasn't a bad gibe, all the same,' Ormsby said, and looked at Joe.

'I could write bunkum like that by the yard,' Arkwright declared.

'If you do, I shall think it my duty to kick you,' Webster told him.

'I shall send a sonnet to the next number,' Cole remarked.

'What do you think about it, Joe?' Sherwood asked.

For a moment this question remained unanswered, and then Joe resolved to burn his boats. 'I wrote the blooming thing,' he said, and at the same time he burst into laughter.

Very possibly his habit of laughing at himself was

partly responsible for his popularity. As Arkwright, who liked to analyze things, had once remarked to Sherwood, 'Joe seems to be able to get out of his own skin, and treat himself as if he is somebody else. I believe that's why even a fellow like Cole, who hated him at first, is quite decent to him now.'

At any rate, Joe's laughter on this occasion took the edge off the criticism that followed his announcement.

'If you want to write, you might keep it to yourself,' Battersby said.

'I call it beastly cheek, airing yourself in the *Granbeian*,' Crake, gorgeous in Cambridge blue pyjamas, declared.

'Joe's cracked,' was Street's opinion.

'What on earth made you do it?' Webster asked very solemnly.

'It's been worth it just to hear what all you fellows say,' Joe replied.

'Well, you mustn't do it again, or I shall have to report you to Max. We've a lot to do without filling the *Granbeian* up with drivel,' Battersby told him.

But although Joe's contribution to the *Granbeian* was treated either as a joke or as a piece of cheek by his friends, he sent it to his mother, and for the next two years she treasured it as evidence that in the course of time he would not be so easily satisfied with his life at Granby. Not that she was wholly dissatisfied with him as he was, for his faults seemed to be negative, and his natural desire to look at the happy side of things was of the greatest help to her when he was at home for his holidays.

The necessity for economy laid siege to Maiden Croft during those years, and although it soon became abundantly evident that Joe could never become as extraordinary an athlete as his brothers,

the fact that he was trying desperately to maintain the family tradition seemed to be a ceaseless pleasure to his father.

Every term Max expressed golden opinions that would have aroused Joe's most cordial disapproval had he heard them.

'If he is not a remarkably successful scrum-half, no one tries more than he does. He helped us to win the cup last term both by his play and cheerfulness in the house. Everybody likes him.'

'As a wicket-keeper he is not first-rate, but he is as keen at the end of a long innings as he is at the beginning. It is impossible for anyone to be slack if he is on the side.'

'It is a pity his pace has not increased as he gets stronger, but I still have great hopes of him as a runner, for he can go on running for a week without any trouble.'

Joe's devotion to the house had, in fact, made Max less critical of, and less ambitious for, him. As at Maiden Croft, so at Granby, these two years had been a period of stress and struggle. What Mr. Boyd referred to privately as 'the rot' had spread rapidly. Granby, term by term, became more and more anxious to receive boys, and more and more bewildered when its numbers grew less and less. One or two houses were still practically full—Max's was never more than twelve short of what it would hold—but at the end of Joe's third year the school was over a hundred and thirty short of its proper numbers, and the Governors had come to the conclusion that drastic steps to remedy this state of things must be taken.

The 'drastic steps' that they took were to obtain a Deanery for Dr. Manning, and to appoint the Reverend Henry Challoner to be Headmaster of Granby. At this appointment Mr. Boyd and his friends openly

rejoiced. Challoner was a young man and a scholar ; an immense opportunity was waiting for him, and they believed that he had the energy and ability to take it.

On the other hand, Max's party considered that the Governors had made a very great mistake.

' They have,' Max wrote to Mr. Rumbold, ' chosen a man scarcely thirty years old, whose experience is not worth mentioning, and who is known to hold very advanced views. For a school with no history and traditions at the back of it, such an appointment might conceivably be wise, but even then it would be a leap in the dark. I have always held that an Old Granbeian ought to be the Head of Granby, and I know that both Fawcett and Trentham were candidates. However, the Governors have decided to pass them over, and to give us Challoner. I can only hope that the future will prove the wisdom of their choice, but at the moment I confess that many of my colleagues are dismayed at the prospect of being directed by such an inexperienced man. Challoner, they tell me, took three firsts at Oxford, but I have often found that these very brilliant scholars are failures as disciplinarians, and quite lacking in powers of organization. Did you see Challoner's portrait in the *Sphere*? I heard Joe deliver his verdict of "rather decent" upon it yesterday, and another boy reply that he thought our new Head looked "rather a rotter." Our vocabulary, you will notice, remains as limited as ever.'

BOOK IV
THE NEW HEADMASTER

THE

PLANTING OF THE

CHAPTER I

MARKING TIME

DURING the years in which Joe was passing from fifteen to seventeen many changes had happened at Maiden Croft. Adversity had attacked the Rumbold business, but as some compensation for these misfortunes Mr. Rumbold lost much of his arrogance. For the first time Mrs. Rumbold had known what it was to be of real use and support to her husband, and during these years she stepped into her right place as mistress of her home.

To all intents and purposes it fell to her lot to explain the change of fortunes to her sons, and to ask them to meet it cheerfully. And on the whole they did not disappoint her. Jumpy at once made calculations, and came to the conclusion that it would be cheaper to live in rooms with a friend than to be running backwards and forwards from London to Maiden Croft. And having arrived at this decision he announced it in as few words as possible, packed up his things, kissed his mother, and departed. Flip continued to live at Maiden Croft, but until things were better he had 'chucked'—as he said—cricket. He did not, however, grumble as much as he easily might have done, and if he boasted privately to his mother that he, and he alone, was keeping the Rumbold business together, she only smiled at his

conceit and was duly thankful that he had put his shoulder to the wheel.

Pads managed to get a degree at Cambridge, and with 'blues' thick upon him, at once accepted an offer to teach small boys at a fashionable private school.

'Goodness knows what I am going to teach them,' he said, 'but I suppose Carruthers will tell me. Anyhow, I'll stay there until he kicks me out.'

'You will only stay there until things have been pulled together. I'm not going to have a son of mine teaching small boys the alphabet,' Mr. Rumbold had replied, with some show of his old spirit.

'It's quite honest,' Pads explained. 'I told Carruthers the only thing I had ever taught was swimming, and that Joe had been my only pupil. He knows what he's in for, and I may like it.'

He went off with a great display of cheerfulness, and promptly wrote to his mother that he was having the time of his life. If he had said the *longest* time of his life he would have been more truthful and less to be admired, for the hours that he spent in presiding over the struggles between small boys and vulgar fractions seemed to him to be without end. Fortunately, he liked small boys when he was not endeavouring to teach them, or his penance would have been severer than he could have endured.

Bingo at the end of his second year at Cambridge came into collision with the authorities, and had the rather grim satisfaction of being the only 'triple blue' who had ever been sent down from his college. He imagined that his father would immediately set to work to put the Dean in his proper place, but Mr. Rumbold did no such thing. Instead of Maiden Croft being upset from garret to cellar by the Dean's injustice and imprudence, Bingo discovered that he

himself was in disgrace, and had been banished—it was his own way of expressing it—to an Agricultural College. There he reigned supreme, and was reigning when Mr. Challoner was appointed to Granby. His mother's requests, however, that he should be economical fell upon deaf ears. If he was compelled to go into exile at an Agricultural College, he intended to make a splash there; and he carried out his intentions.

In Joe's case it was unnecessary to preach economy, for although he had invariably been reckless in spending what money he had got, he had never, either at his private school or at Granby, clamoured for more to be sent to him. And as regards clothes, he clung so tenaciously to his ancient raiment that his mother and Jenny had almost to bribe him before he would be separated from it. Socks, which occupied a good deal of Ormsby's time and attention during his third year at Granby, did not appeal urgently to Joe.

'If,' he said, 'all you have got to do to become a blood is to make your feet sort of rainbowy, I'm bothered if it is worth it.'

'Why do you have a slit in the back of your coat?' Ormsby had replied.

'I'm blest if I know; because the tailor stuck it there.'

'You're posing, Joe,' Ormsby retorted. 'You pretend to despise socks and ties and decent-looking trousers, and yet you always look all right. If you will go up to school with your trousers turned down, and a sweater and no tie, I'll begin to believe in you.'

'I'm not out to get a freakship, and I don't care a red cent what socks you wear if you don't want me to look at them.'

'That's just like you, you never care what happens

to me. You wouldn't bother if I suddenly burst out into a volcano of spots; I don't believe you would even notice them.'

'Now you are beginning to talk rot,' Joe replied, and Ormsby gave a grunt of satisfaction.

Joe's equability was still a source of annoyance to the emotional Ormsby. The former's idea of friendship was a steady progress along a straight line. If a boy was his friend he stood up for him in all crises, but he preferred that the support should be given behind the friend's back. Ormsby, on the other hand, preferred something more exciting and demonstrative than this.

Nevertheless this friendship had strengthened as the years passed. Joe found in Ormsby something that was lacking in nearly every boy in Max's. He was friendly enough with most of the boys in the house now that Rose had gone and Cole was no longer a nuisance, but with the exception of Piper and one or two others who were idiotic enough to lose their money by betting, they were very much of a pattern.

So Ormsby, with his unexpectedness, was a god-send. You never knew what he would do next, or what he would say. But although Ormsby's impulsiveness and inability to stop himself from making rather cruel fun of boys like Arkwright had prevented him from becoming very popular, he was an influence in Max's, and knew that he was. That influence he had used solely for two purposes: the first to push himself up the ladder, the second to drag Joe with him.

His devotion to Joe was—if secondary to his devotion to himself—very real and incessant. So incessant, indeed, was it, that Joe sometimes felt as if he required a holiday, and on those occasions Sherwood was always at hand with offers of companion-

ship. These offers, however, were never accepted in the spirit in which they were made, for Joe had gradually been compelled to acknowledge to himself that Ormsby was after all 'a bit of a prophet,' and that Sherwood was really trying to 'mess things up.' The best of the whole thing was, in Joe's opinion, that Ormsby seldom showed any signs of suspecting how true a prophet he was.

In those days Joe often remembered and smiled to himself at Ormsby's ancient remarks about Rum-boldships, for Bingo himself had never been keener on colours and caps than Ormsby had become.

'You've got to buck up like mad; I've got my Twenty-two colours, and you must get yours,' was a sample of the advice that was constantly sounding in Joe's ears.

And if Joe replied that he did not want to get colours unless he was worth them, Ormsby would retort that they had made a bargain to become bloods together, and that he was not going on unless Joe was coming with him.

Colours, in fact, were the symbols of bloodship at Granby, and when Joe, forgetting for a moment the task he had set himself, had called them 'tinkling symbols,' he was roundly abused.

The outcome of Ormsby's determination had been that he had won for himself a very comfortable niche in the Granby athletic world. He had outdistanced Sherwood, for the latter was still only in the First House Eleven. In football, too, he meant to get into the School Fifteen during the term that was coming, and to say that as he was stand-off half he could play with nobody except Joe as his scrum-half. If, however, he was to dictate terms to his captain, he knew that he would have to make himself indispensable to the Fifteen, for he was dismally aware

that at least three boys, Tudor, de Saumarez, and Sherwood, were as good scrum-halves as Joe.

But the chief difficulties in regard to this arrangement he expected to come from Joe himself, for at the end of their third year at Granby he had shown more than one sign of restiveness at being continually urged on to athletic glory. In the Classical Football Fifteen and Cricket Twenty-two, a fair fives player, and more than a fair runner, Joe seemed to Ormsby to be utterly oblivious of the fact that already he was almost qualified as a blood.

Ormsby, watching over him, was puzzled by his lack of self-importance. Joe, he considered, was getting the things that were most important to get at Granby, and still appeared to be eternally dreaming of something else. There was a future danger in this, and when Ormsby and Joe returned once more to Granby the former resolved to deal with it at once. After all the trouble he had taken, he did not mean to let Joe off his part of the bargain; the game had to be played through to the end.

So, having cleared Arkwright out of Joe's room on the first night of the term, he sat down in the most comfortable chair and opened fire.

'I wish, Joe,' he said, 'you wouldn't encourage worms like Arkwright to treat your room as if it is their own.'

'The Infant was just lending me a book,' Joe replied, and began to hang a picture on the wall.

'What book?'

'A book of poems by a man called T. E. Brown.'

Ormsby expressed himself freely about poets in general, and T. E. Brown in particular, reserving, however, his most unqualified disapproval for Arkwright and smugs of his brand.

'You've come back in your usual rage with every-

thing. 'You always seem to bottle it up for the first day of term,' Joe said, and stood on a chair to put his pictures straight. 'By the way,' he added, 'it's your turn to have our William Rumbold masterpiece.'

'I'll give it to you. No, I won't,' Ormsby corrected at once. 'I believe it's a sort of mascot or whatever you call it. We'll go on sharing it, and I'll stick it in my room with its face to the wall.'

'Do you know that Max is going to send in your name and mine as school-prefects?' Joe asked him.

'Yes,' Ormsby answered. 'Temperley won't make a bad head if we back him up properly.'

To this Joe made no reply, but Ormsby's next remark made him turn from his pictures and ultimately descend to the floor.

'What's the matter with you, Joe? I've come to find out and to knock it on the head,' he said.

'The matter,' Joe repeated, and then sat down abruptly.

'Yes, the matter. Aren't you keen any longer?'

There was a note of appeal in Ormsby's voice to which Joe could not save himself from responding.

'Of course I'm keen. Don't you worry about that,' he said.

'You see,' Ormsby continued quietly, 'we shall both be in the Lower Sixth this term and regular bloods. Temperley will be President of the Pow-Wow Club, and you can be Vice if you want to be. But you've got to put your back into getting into the School Fifteen.'

'You aren't there yet,' Joe said, and laughed.

'No, but I played several times last Easter term.'

'So you did,' Joe remarked, as if he had forgotten this important fact.

'I'm pretty well bound to be stand-off half, and I

shall have something to say about the fellow who plays with me,' Ormsby declared.

'Then for mercy's sake don't say anything about me unless I improve. I'm as slow as a snail.'

'A keen chap would jump at the chance.'

'Oh, shut up. Unless I improve I haven't a dog's chance. Tudor's better than I am, and so is Sherwood.'

'I don't believe you want to get in, you're sick of the whole game; you're sort of missing something. What is it?'

'I'm blessed if I know,' Joe replied, but he felt as if Ormsby's insight was almost uncanny.

'You've got to go on now you've begun. You've jolly nearly got there.'

'Got where?'

'Why, to the blooming top.'

'Oh, I'll go on. My father would be awfully sick if I didn't, and—well, it's jolly decent of you. You'll "get there" all right.'

'And it's worth it.'

'Rather,' Joe agreed, and began to talk about the new Head. 'He's only about thirty, and has about half a dozen firsts,' he said.

'He'll probably clear out the Jungle,' Ormsby remarked, and Joe began to laugh, for the 'Jungle' was the Granbeian name for the class into which the especially brainless athletes of the school had been packed by Dr. Manning. Once in the Jungle a boy was considered to be safe from superannuation, because by a polite fiction he was held to be specializing. What he was specializing in was usually, however, neither known to himself nor to anyone else.

'If,' said Joe, 'he clears out the Jungle he will make Max jump with fury.'

'This is the first time for three years that more

fellows have come here than have left. We're three less short than we were last term ; Max won't quarrel about that,' Ormsby replied.

' It's rather sport having a new Head.'

' If he doesn't go changing everything ; but,' Ormsby continued, ' when you've been used to one chap it's rough luck to find you've got to change round and get used to another. It may be all right for the place in the end if this Head upsets everything we've been brought up on, but it will be rotten for the fellows who are here now.'

' He won't be such an ass,' Joe replied.

* * * * *

In appointing Mr. Challoner to Granby the Governors knew that they were gambling. The more cautious of them had advised a safer man, one who would not let the school down further, even if he had not the power to rebuild its fortunes. In the end, however, they had been persuaded to discard the less perilous course, and fearfully to pin their faith upon the youngest man who had applied for the post.

But Mr. Challoner's youthfulness, which had seemed to some of the Governors his chief drawback and to others his chief recommendation, was really of less importance than they thought. His supporters had expected that he would dash upon Granby like an intelligent whirlwind, and that progress would walk hand-in-hand with reform from the very moment he arrived. While the Governors, who had opposed him, remembered that Granby lay behind a fortified wall of tradition, and prophesied nothing but disaster from the hot-headedness and inexperience of this young man. Both parties agreed that great changes would at once be made, but as regards the results of them they held very different opinions.

Mr. Challoner, however, though young in years, was

not so impetuous as both his friends and antagonists had expected him to be. For some weeks there was only one change that could fairly be put down to him for either praise or blame, and that was the removal of Mr. Boyd from taking the Lower Sixth, to the class into which most of the promising boys passed when they entered the school. This, some people thought, was 'one in the eye for old Boyd,' but Mr. Boyd had every reason to think that it was the greatest compliment that could be paid to him. For years he had been groaning over the fact that the young scholars of Granby should fall at once into the hands of a master whose methods seemed especially designed to kill intellectual interest and ambition.

As the term went on Granby watched Mr. Chaloner very closely, and was greatly puzzled by him. Joe and Ormsby frankly approved of his face, but could not make out 'what the chap was up to.'

'He seems friendly enough, but he's either got a precious deep game on, or he's a slacker. The Sixth say he never rags them, and sometimes he'll talk to them for nearly the whole hour about all sorts of queer things,' Ormsby said.

'We've been here five weeks, and he's only preached on one Sunday; but when you meet him he doesn't rush by like the Man, and sort of look at you as if you were a beastly nuisance,' Joe responded.

'He's got about an acre of forehead; there must be something behind it,' Ormsby said.

'I'll bet he's all right; he's just keeping his eyes open and his mouth shut. I'm *for* him,' Joe declared.

'So am I—at least, I think I am. Anyhow, it's only fair to give the chap a chance. What the blazes are you laughing at?'

'I like the way you seem to think you can run the

whole show,' Joe said; and this answer annoyed Ormsby.

'We could run a jolly lot more of it than we do, if only you would stick your back into it. You simply mess up your evenings doing nothing—reading drivel and that sort of thing—and you won't try a yard to get into the Fifteen,' he said.

'You know I'm not worth it,' Joe said.

'I know I want you to play with me, and I ought to count for something,' Ormsby returned, and stalked angrily out of the room.

For several minutes Joe stood and looked out of his window. In the last few weeks Ormsby had changed mightily; or if he had not really changed, he seemed to be travelling at such a pace that Joe neither could nor was anxious to keep up with him. Boys like Street and Harper, who had developed into nothing except amiable nonentities, were no longer noticed by Ormsby. 'I've got no use for that sort of fellow,' he had told Joe; but the latter remembered that they had all been friends at one time, and did not mean to forget it. Arkwright, however, was the boy who aroused Ormsby's active contempt, and if he only had neglected the Infant as he neglected Street, Joe would not have been so worried. But there was no disguising the fact that Ormsby was becoming the plague of Arkwright's life. He never physically bullied him, but he took a malicious delight in ridiculing him on every possible occasion.

'It does him good,' he replied in answer to Joe's expostulations. 'He's full of new whines every day, and he'd burst unless I gave him something to whine about. I'll make a man of him in time.'

'You are more likely to make him a lunatic. I'd rather gibe at a sick parrot,' Joe told him.

‘What would this house be like with about forty Arkwrights in it?’

‘Forty of any of us would be rotten enough, but forty Infants would be too gloomy for anything.’

‘That’s just it; I’m trying to cheer him up,’ Ormsby said.

‘Then you are jolly well not succeeding,’ Joe retorted. ‘He comes here and almost blubs.’

‘I’ll soon stop that,’ Ormsby had said, and had taken it for granted that as far as Joe was concerned the question of Arkwright was settled.

Ormsby’s increasing sense of self-importance and desire to plague Arkwright were not, however, the only things that made Joe anxious about him. At all hours of the day he seemed as if he must live on excitement of some kind, and when there was nothing else for him to do he went either to Piper’s or Crake’s room and treated them as his familiar friends. If he liked to make friends with such fellows, Joe was not going to say anything; but Piper and Crake were nevertheless beginning to build up a set in the house that was already no good to anybody, and was likely to become worse than it was. Still, if Temperley did not mind, it was no business, Joe thought, of his; in fact, he had been so universally popular for such a long time, that the idea of making himself an annoyance to anyone was thoroughly distasteful. He wanted to manage his own affairs, and to leave other fellows to manage theirs; but he had not been chosen a school-prefect for the purpose of carrying out such a quiet programme as this, and the day was rapidly approaching when his duties and his inclinations were to come into conflict.

Joe, having come to the conclusion that was most natural to him and most convenient, turned away from the window and picked up a book. He had been

making, he decided, a mountain out of a molehill. Ormsby was right enough really—the best friend any fellow could want to have. He would soon be tired of baiting Arkwright, and of being friends with Piper. Anyhow, it was no use worrying, and as it was Saturday night, and what preparation he had got to do could easily be put off, he sat down to read. The book he had picked up was ‘The Selected Poems of T. E. Brown,’ and, opening it at random, his eyes fell upon ‘Clifton’:

‘I’m here at Clifton, grinding at the mill
 My feet for thrice nine barren years have trod;
 But there are rocks and waves at Scarlett still,
 And gorse runs riot in Glen Chass—thank God.
 * * * * *
 ‘There is no silence here: the truculent quack
 Insists with acrid shrieks my ears to prod,
 And, if I stop them, fumes; but there’s no lack
 Of silence still on Carraghyn—thank God!
 * * * * *
 ‘Pragmatic fibs surround my soul, and bate it
 With measured phrase, that asks the assenting nod;
 I rise, and say the bitter thing, and hate it—
 But Wordsworth’s Castle’s still at Peel—thank God!’

“‘There is no silence here,’” Joe repeated, and read the poem once more.

Then he shut the book with a thud, and, jumping from his chair, he walked back to the window.

‘I’ve got the pip, or something; I’ll turf that book out of my room,’ he muttered.

Directly afterwards he was leaning out of his window, and staring into the night.

‘That man knows too much,’ he said to himself. ‘He knows all about it; he’s made me feel absolutely rotten.’

“‘Truculent quack”—we simply quack all day. There’s no time for anything; we just waddle round, thinking we’re prize bloods.’

He stayed at the window until at last he shivered from head to feet, and at the same time felt thoroughly ashamed of himself. 'I'm grouching,' he said. 'Ormsby would have had a fit if he'd caught me at it.'

But, try as he would, he could neither settle down to work nor to enjoy himself. In a flash T. E. Brown's verses had brought home to him the emptiness of the life he was leading, but he did not mean to acknowledge this without a struggle. Compared with other fellows of his age he was high enough in the school, and if he had just been pushed up from class to class merely because most fellows had been slacker than he was, he had still been pushed up. But, all the same, something seemed to be lacking; he had known the lack of it for months, but until this evening he had never been so certain of it.

* * * * *

When he awoke on the following morning, he had such a violent headache that he had to stay in bed.

'You have got influenza, Joe,' Mrs. Max said, when she went to see him. 'You must be moved to the sick-room.'

'So that's what's the matter with me,' he replied, and suddenly looked more cheerful.

'Did you feel ill last night?' she asked.

'Yes—at least, sort of ill. I'm glad it's influenza.'

'It seems a funny thing to be glad about; but you will soon be quite well again,' Mrs. Max said.

'Rather, I feel better already. Doesn't influenza always make everyone feel horrible when it's coming on?'

'I have never had it, but I believe it does,' Mrs. Max said; and Joe thought that his mood of the night before was quite satisfactorily explained.

CHAPTER II

TAKING CHARGE

'If Joe,' Mrs. Max said, 'is kept away from school much longer, I believe he will break the only rule of the sick-room that he hasn't broken already.'

'Has he been very troublesome?' Mrs. Rumbold, who had driven over from Maiden Croft, asked.

'Not exactly troublesome, but he is what he calls "fed up."'

'He told me that he feels perfectly well, and that Dr. Franklin won't let him out, and won't say what is the matter with him.'

'Joe has been growing fast, and the doctor thinks that he has been rather overdoing it altogether.'

Mrs. Rumbold smiled. 'Has he been overworking?' she asked.

'That is not the usual Granby complaint, though I should not dare to say so to anyone except you,' Mrs. Max replied.

'Shall I take him home for a day or two?'

'Does he want to go?'

'No; he says he wants to go back to school at once.'

'Then I think I would leave him here. He had a bad time last night because Ormsby got his school football colours, and he was not in the hall to cheer him,' Mrs. Max said.

Now that Ormsby had been mentioned, there were several questions Mrs. Rumbold wanted to ask about the friendship between Joe and him, and so she considered Max's sudden entrance into the drawing-room to be particularly inopportune.

'You've seen Joe, Mrs. Rumbold? There isn't much the matter with him, is there? I've been telling Dr. Franklin that he is an old woman.'

For a few moments the conversation hovered round the state of Joe's health, but Max was in his most impatient mood, and fidgeted round and across the room until Mrs. Max at last begged him to sit down.

'The fact of the matter is, I can think of nothing except what our new Head has just said to me. I walked down from school with him, and can't forget the rubbish he talked. I was rather disposed——'

'What did he say?' Mrs. Max interrupted.

'You really mustn't mind if I tell you, Mrs. Rumbold, because, of course, the man is mad.'

'He seemed sane enough when we dined with him,' Mrs. Max remarked quietly.

'All the same he is mad, and I'm glad to know it. Such utter rubbish and ignorance is positively disgusting.'

'Do sit down and tell us what the rubbish is,' Mrs. Max said.

'I met him,' Max continued, as he flung himself into a chair, 'just outside the school-gates, and he began at once. "I am glad to see you still have a boy called Rumbold in your house. What is the matter with him?" So I told him that Joe was really as fit as anything, only Dr. Franklin was scared to death if a boy sneezed; and then I talked about your sons, Mrs. Rumbold, and what they had done for my house and for the school.'

'That was very kind of you,' Mrs. Rumbold told him.

'But what do you think he said?' Max asked, and jerked himself forward in his chair.

'I can't imagine,' Mrs. Rumbold replied.

'If you can believe me, he wiped your sons off the face of the earth in a sentence. "Oh, the Rumbolds; they are very fine athletes, aren't they? But I wasn't thinking of them, but of that most brilliant man, William Rumbold." Those are his actual words, and I have never been compelled to listen to greater rubbish. William Rumbold'—Max's voice reached its highest pitch of indignation—'who attacked all of us as if we were a lot of impostors! If half the things he said of us were true, nearly every schoolmaster in England ought to be in prison for taking money under false pretences.'

It was most unfortunate, Mrs. Max thought, that William Rumbold should have suddenly cropped up again when Joe's mother was present, but not in any way did she betray her feelings.

'There have always,' she said very quietly, 'been two opinions about those articles.'

'To my mind they were thoroughly traitorous and untrue, and I told the Head so,' Max retorted.

'And what did he say?' Mrs. Rumbold asked.

'He thinks—or pretends to think—that the object of them was to save public schools from ruin, and that William Rumbold is the best friend we have ever had. And he went on to tell me that William is the most brilliant journalist of the day—"a man of very far-reaching aims indeed, and with tremendous abilities to help him to carry them out"—that's what our Head thinks of William.'

'At any rate, his opinion is not exceptional. It is quite a common thing to hear that William is one of the rising men of the day,' Mrs. Rumbold said.

‘That I cannot believe,’ Max replied. ‘I am sorry to say such things about any connection of yours, Mrs. Rumbold, but I am convinced that those articles were written merely to create a sensation.’

‘Oh, bother the articles,’ Mrs. Max exclaimed, ‘they are years old, and forgotten by most of us, and what is the good of thinking about them any more?’

‘Just this good, that now the Head has expressed his approval of them, we know where we are, and had better look out for trouble. Granby is going to be spring-cleaned from top to bottom, and you and I, my dear, will soon be living on a pension.’

‘Then,’ Mrs. Max remarked, ‘I shall ask Mr. William Rumbold to stay with us, for he will have saved me from a hundred and one daily annoyances.’

‘What have you got to be annoyed about?’ Max asked her.

‘You first and foremost, of course,’ she replied, and smiled at him.

‘That, Mrs. Rumbold, is the way I am treated in private, but I beg you to keep it a secret from Joe,’ Max said; but as he took her to her carriage the spirit of prophecy once more took possession of him, and he would have been intensely astonished had he known that his visitor was hoping that most of his prophecies would come true.

In expressing his opinion of William Rumbold to Max, the Head had not by any means spoken on the spur of the moment. Slowly he had been realizing the condition of the school, and had been thinking over the changes that would have to be made; and he had summed up Max correctly as a man who would soon spread abroad any information that was given to him. He knew that there was a tremendous

fight in front of him, but, far from being dismayed by the prospect of it, he chafed a little over the necessity of obtaining inside knowledge and of making very definite plans before he hoisted his signals.

That Max would be his chief opponent the Head knew full well, and he considered himself lucky to have a man as leader against him who would fight with his cards laid bare on the table. It was, he believed, going to be a straight fight, even if it was also bound to be a fierce one.

Granby, as he had found it, stood for athletic efficiency, but for nothing else in the wide world, and that had vigorously to be altered if the school was to justify its existence. The Head looked through the school lists, and saw that no Granbeian had won a Balliol Scholarship for sixteen years, and that during the last eight years no boy had even tried for one. He traced the careers of boys who had entered Granby as scholars, and was literally astounded by the results of his search.

It had really almost come to this, he thought: that scarcely any boys, except the sons of O.G.'s, were at present sent to Granby unless they were either so stupid that their parents feared that they would be superannuated from other schools, or so rich that an education in games was considered to be more desirable than any other.

But for several weeks the Head pondered over the difficulties confronting him, and made no sign that he considered the state of Granby to be far worse than he had ever anticipated. And then, on the Sunday morning on which Joe was allowed to go back to school, he preached a sermon that set every master and every boy talking.

'A problem,' he said in the course of his address,

'lies before us, and that problem is the future of the school to which all of us belong. How are we going to solve it? It is impossible, I most firmly believe, that any solution can be a happy one unless every boy in Granby puts his shoulder most unselfishly to the wheel. I want your help so that I, in turn, may be able to help you. I want you to think, for every boy can think, though I dare say many of you will not believe me when I say so. If it has never occurred to you to think, take my advice and begin at once, and you will be surprised how interesting you will find it. I want you to think of yourselves in relation to this school and to the wider world beyond it, more especially to the latter. I want you to court responsibility, and not to shirk it. I want the very youngest of you to feel that you are a most essential piece in a great puzzle, and that unless you see to yourself and give of your best, the puzzle can never be perfectly put together.

“This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

* * * * *

'The Line' on this Sunday welcomed Joe with the greatest cordiality, and roundly accused him of shamming.

'You will have to tackle the doctor about that. I wanted to come back all the time,' he replied.

But when 'The Line' was formed, Joe's illness was forgotten, and the Head's sermon was freely discussed.

'Fancy the Head working an old zigzag puzzle into a sermon! The Man would simply have had a fit,' Ormsby said.

'It's the first sermon I have listened to bang through

since I've been here,' Stirling, the Captain of the Fifteen, remarked.

'He seemed to me to *want* a precious lot,' Temperley said.

'I should think it made some of the beaks sit up. I saw Max hanging on to his chin as if he was afraid it was going to fall off,' a Bonhamite, called Kennedy, declared.

'Why should it make the beaks sit up?' Battersby asked.

'Well, when the head-beak goes down on his hands and knees and asks the smallest kid in the place to help him, it looks to me as if he thinks we are in a precious poor way,' Kennedy answered.

'He's going to change things; you see if he doesn't,' Ormsby said.

'Yes,' Kennedy replied; 'but he may not make things any better for fellows like Battersby and me, who are in the Jungle and want to stay there for a few more terms.'

What might be called the religious side of the Head's sermon was not mentioned, and indeed had anyone been daring enough to refer to it, he would promptly have been considered guilty of bad form. 'The Line' never laughed at religion, but it tacitly and utterly tabooed any reference to it.

When, however, Joe and Ormsby were out for a walk together in the afternoon, the former returned to the subject of the Head's sermon.

'What did you really think of it?' he asked.

'Oh, I don't know,' Ormsby answered. 'It was all right as far as sermons go. It was only just over twenty minutes, and the Man never stopped short of half an hour.'

'I could have listened for ages,' Joe said, and Ormsby whistled.

'I don't wonder after being cooped up in that blessed sicker. I should think for a change you'd be glad to hear anyone talk. Not that the Head can't talk well; he never goes about floundering for a word, sort of hooking it and then not landing it, like that old Archdeacon we had last Sunday.'

'It was all different somehow,' Joe said.

'How?'

'I don't quite know, but it seemed to me really to mean something.'

'I'd like all the other men who have preached to us to hear you say that. We should be getting a bit of our own back,' Ormsby declared.

'Didn't it strike you like that?'

'I don't know that it did. The Head's got a tough job in front of him, and of course he has got to stir us up to try to get us on his side. That's what he's here for.'

'That's rather a vile way of looking at it,' Joe replied.

Anyhow, I'm not going to jump at the first bait the Head holds out. I believe you are really crammed full of sentiment, Joe, and as soon as a man comes along with a decent face, and jaws at you, he has simply got you sitting.'

'For years you have been going at me because I'm not sentimental enough, and then you suddenly swop round. I should think I am about as sentimental as a camel.'

'And,' Ormsby said, 'you also seem to have the camel's hump.'

'Not a bit of it; I never felt less humpy,' Joe returned.

'Then I can't make out why you should want to talk about a sermon. I say, Joe,' Ormsby continued, 'you aren't going to turn "pi," are you?'

“Pi”? Why should I turn “pi”?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Fellows do turn “pi.”’

‘We’ve never been either one thing or the other,’ Joe said.

‘You’ve always been more the one, and I’ve been more the other,’ Ormsby replied.

‘That’s bosh. We’ve always done the same things and been in for the same kind of rows, and I vote we stick to it.’

Ormsby propped himself up against a gate, and looked over the valley in which Joe and Cole had settled their fight.

‘There’s the blooming field, Joe. Do you remember?’

‘I’m not likely to forget. If it hadn’t been such a sticky wicket Cole would have punched my head off.’

‘That sort of cleared the air. Everything has been much better since then.’

‘Rather,’ Joe agreed.

‘That was your row, and I saw you through it. If I had one on my own hook, would you see me through it?’

‘What sort of row?’

‘You know,’ Ormsby replied.

‘I’d much rather you chucked the whole thing. What’s the good of playing cards with fellows like Piper and Crake, and what’s the use of betting?’ he asked.

‘It’s something to do. I wanted something to do while you were cooped up in the sick.’

‘Weren’t you doing it before?’ Joe inquired, and Ormsby laughed.

‘You don’t exactly let a fellow off easily,’ he said.

‘I’m not doing anything except asking you to stop,’ Joe retorted.

‘It isn’t so easy to stop; I’m a born gambler. I won thirty-seven bob on Bushranger last week.’

‘Then hang on to it, or I’ll bet Piper will clear you out of every red cent you’ve got. Piper’s made like that, he’s as cool as a codfish, you haven’t got a chance with him.’

‘Oh, haven’t I!’ Ormsby exclaimed. ‘We’ll soon see about that.’ And Joe realized at once that he had made a great mistake.

To tell Ormsby that he was bound to lose was the surest way of making him continue to play, and Joe could have cordially kicked himself for making such a foolish remark.

‘I wish to goodness you’d chuck it, all the same,’ he said.

‘I’ll chuck it in a week, I will really,’ Ormsby declared.

And with that promise Joe had to be content. Not a word about the immorality of a school-prefect playing cards and betting passed between them, though neither of them were without prickings of conscience about it. Ormsby, however, had succeeded in persuading himself that to play cards was not a bad offence as long as you could pay when you lost, and Joe considered that it was Temperley’s duty—if it was anyone’s—to put a stop to the meetings in Piper’s room.

‘I guessed before you went into the sicker that you knew what I was doing. But how did you find out?’ Ormsby asked, when they were walking back to Granby.

‘What does it matter?’ Joe replied.

‘I know; I’ll bet I know. Sherwood told you.’ And Joe walked on without speaking.

‘What business of his was it to go sneaking to you, when he only happened to find it out by an acci-

dent? Most fellows would have the decency not to go telling everybody what they were never meant to know. I'll tell him to jolly well keep his mouth shut,' Ormsby continued.

'Then you will be wasting time, for I've told him that already,' Joe replied.

'He's always hanging on to your coat-tails and sitting on your chest.'

'It's no use getting in a bait. He wouldn't have told me unless he had thought I knew already. At least,' Joe added, 'he said he wouldn't.'

'Why should he think you knew already?'

'I can't see how he could think anything else; but what he thinks doesn't make a rap of difference.'

Ormsby thought over this for a few seconds, and then decided to be content with it. 'You are a melancholy old bird to-day, Joe, and want cheering up all round. You will probably get it to-morrow, for Erskine was away on Friday and Saturday, and if we get one of those temporary fellows to take us I mean to have a rag,' he said, and insisted that Joe should come to his room for tea.

On the following morning the Lower Sixth found that a 'temporary fellow' was in charge of the class, and proceeded at once to worry him. Substitutes at Granby were considered to be fair game, and as in Dr. Manning's time they had been pitchforked into their work and left to make the best of it, their lot could not be said to have been exactly a happy one. Some of them had managed to enforce more discipline than others, but all of them had suffered from lack of support, and had left Granby without any desire to return to it.

Mr. Allen, who had come to take Mr. Erskine's place, was a young and enthusiastic man who liked boys and thought that he could control them; but

he had never before been brought into contact with a large class of big boys. Moreover, it had not previously occurred to him that he could be ragged, and his first experience of the Lower Sixth was—as Ormsby declared after the day was over—‘a regular ey opener for him.’

Ormsby himself had set the ball rolling by addressing Mr. Allen as ‘Teacher,’ and after that the class took up the game and played it for more than it was worth. Pandemonium practically reigned throughout the Monday and Tuesday, for although several boys thought secretly that it was ‘a bit rough on a decent-looking beak,’ they did not attempt to stop the ragging. But by the Wednesday Mr. Allen had begun slowly to win his way; the first hour passed in comparative calm, and when the class came up to translate some Euripides, which they were supposed to have prepared, they took their places without the noise that had prevailed during the previous days. And this was more good fortune than they deserved, for just as they had settled down the Head came into the room, and asked Mr. Allen to change places with him for an hour.

‘We are fairly bottled,’ Ormsby whispered to Joe. ‘I haven’t even opened the book. Where do we begin?’

Joe knew where the lesson began, but very little else about it.

The Head looked down the list of names, and then called Ormsby’s. The class bent their heads steadfastly over their books and prepared themselves for trouble. In ten minutes, however, the Head had abandoned Euripides, and had sent the class back to their desks to do Latin Prose. Six boys, including Joe, had tried to stumble through a lesson that they ought to have prepared, and their failure had been

abject. But apart from rather contemptuously cutting short the blundering efforts of each boy, the Head had not expressed any opinion either of them or of their performances.

That something was going to happen the class felt certain, but what it was they had no time to think. The Head had given them a stiff piece of prose, and had told them that they were to show it up to him five minutes before the hour. And then, during the remaining five minutes, he assembled the class before his desk, and told them plainly what he thought of their conduct during the last two days.

‘You may have wondered,’ he said, ‘why I have not come to this class-room to stop the noise. The reason was that I wished to give you a chance to behave yourselves. Your conduct has been a disgrace to the school, for you have insulted a stranger who came here at a moment’s notice to do his best for you and for me. I am most heartily ashamed of the whole class, but the five of you who are school-prefects are most especially to blame. The privileges that a school-prefect holds will be suspended for a month as far as Beddington, Wood, Douglas, Ormsby, and Rumbold are concerned. The rest of you I shall merely bind over to behave yourselves in future, but I warn you that I shall have no confidence in you until you show yourselves worthy of the position you have in the school, and that if I have any more trouble the punishment will be as severe as I can make it.’

Mr. Allen returned to a class extremely subdued in mood. ‘Sheepish’ was scarcely the word for their faces, and during the last hour of that morning the silence in the Lower Sixth room was almost dismal after the noise of the previous days.

‘I’m not going to be talked to as if I was a puling

infant,' Ormsby said, when he and Joe were walking back to the house. 'I shall tell Max all about it, and ask him to go for the Head. Max won't stand this sort of thing.'

And then Joe, to Ormsby's undisguised disgust, began to chuckle.

'What the blazes are you grinning at? You always grin at perfectly rotten things,' he said.

'I wonder Allen didn't burst himself with laughing,' Joe spluttered.

'What was there to laugh at?'

'Why, the change. I nearly came in two trying not to laugh. Did you see Beddington's face? It's always rather like a horse's, but after the Head had gone it looked longer and narrower than ever.'

'I never felt less like laughing in my life. The Head is an absolute rotter,' Ormsby declared.

But Joe was saved from having to express his opinion of the justice of his punishment by Temperley meeting them.

'I've done all I can, but Stirling won't change his mind,' he said, and Ormsby stopped short in the road and replied that if Stirling had got a mind to change he had got to change it.

'He won't; he's the most pig-headed captain of footer we've ever had here,' Temperley told him.

'What's old Stirling been doing now? He's a most awfully good sort,' Joe said.

'He's a fat-headed idiot!' Ormsby retorted, and walked indignantly into the house.

'Ormsby's got the pip; he gets it fairly and squarely when he does get it,' Temperley said, and Joe told him what had happened during the morning.

'That's a bit of a jar for both of you, and with old Stirling turning rusty it is rather piling it on,' Temperley declared.

‘ But what has Stirling been doing ? ’

‘ Don’t you know ? ’

Joe shook his head.

‘ Why, Ormsby wants you to play against Bedchester next Saturday, and said all sorts of things to Stirling about it. And Stirling says Sherwood is the best scrum-half in the place, and that he is going to play next Saturday.’

‘ Sherwood is jolly good,’ Joe remarked. ‘ I wish Ormsby wouldn’t bother about me ; I’m not fit to play against Bedchester after being in the sicker.’

‘ Ormsby would rather have any scrum-half to play with than Sherwood,’ Temperley said.

‘ But that’s rot,’ Joe replied at once, ‘ for we get another school colour if Sherwood gets into the Fifteen.’

‘ That’s what I told Ormsby, but he wants you to get in, and doesn’t care a brass farthing what happens if you don’t.’

‘ He will have to be muzzled. I say, we can’t come to tea at Mother Bloomfield’s to-night, we shall have to be in before lock-up.’

‘ You don’t seem very sick about it,’ Temperley said.

‘ It’s only for a month,’ Joe replied, and strolled into the house.

CHAPTER III

THE RECOVERY

THE Head's sermon was only the prelude to a great campaign. By the end of his first year at Granby everyone interested in the school knew not only what his programme was, but also that he intended to carry it out however vigorously he was opposed. Of course he made mistakes, and knew that he made them; but there was not time, he considered, to waste in apologies. And if his judgment erred more than once, he, at any rate, succeeded in bringing about many changes that even his fiercest opponents found difficult to criticize.

From the very outset he proclaimed openly that the most attentive teaching and watchful supervision are useless in public schools, as long as the individual boy is not allowed opportunity and room to develop. 'Curriculum' was an abhorrent word to him, for under the dictatorship of a curriculum both a sense of independence and all originality of thought were crushed. 'We have bred a type of schoolboy,' he said, 'and I think that he is a very fine type indeed. But he is permanent. I firmly believe that his good qualities, his generosity, his sense of fair play, his bravery and healthiness, are with us for all time, and that if we wished to root them out we should be powerless to do so. We

have got him, and we have done well to get him, but in getting him we have allowed him to set up one ideal to the destruction of nearly every other ideal, and that is the athletic one. What we have got to do is to build on most excellent foundations, to send our boys out with higher aims and ambitions, to give them knowledge in the broadest sense of the word, to let them think and to give them opportunities for their individual capacities to expand.'

'It is all very fine,' Max remarked to his wife, 'for the Head to talk what I believe the Americans call "hot air," but how is he going to work? If we are to attend to the individualities of a few hundred boys we shall want the same number of masters. I am glad that I shan't be here to see the mess he will make of things.'

The energies, however, of the Head were not confined to talking. In his second term he introduced sweeping changes in the organization of the school, and astonished Max even more than he infuriated him.

The Juggle was abolished; six boys in it were superannuated, and the remainder were absorbed into other classes. The scheme of school work was at the same time drastically changed, and boys in the upper forms were encouraged to specialize. Each boy in the Sixth was almost driven to admit that he had an inclination for specialization of some kind; he was, in short, invited to regard himself not as a receptacle into which knowledge had to be poured in daily doses, but as a reasoning being for whom some form of learning must have a strong attraction. The necessity of paying more attention to modern languages was also recognized, and a boy who specialized in history was given twelve hours in the week to study French and German.

English literature formed a part, though not at first a very prominent part, of the Head's scheme. Below the upper classes of the school the boys found that more opportunities were given them to learn history and geography, and the elements, at least, of science were taught to every boy in the lower forms.

That the Universities called the educational tune that the public schools had to play, the Head knew and regretted. But if it was impossible for him to get at the very root of the educational difficulty, it was possible for him to try and avoid it. By some means or other intellectual interests had to be stimulated instead of being strangled, and if Granbeians were ever to have their sense of responsibility widened they would have to do more for themselves and have less done for them. The rut into which Granby had fallen was, the Head considered, a deep one, but it was only a rut.

During these months the Head knew what it was to suffer from every form of antagonism, and to discover that the bludgeon as a weapon of assault was far preferable to the pin. No sooner had he entered the arena than Max and the men of his type attacked with vigour. They criticized his methods, warned him of the danger of sweeping changes, begged and even bullied him to remember that he was on almost sacred ground, and that everything he had found at Granby was hallowed by tradition.

But whatever Max said was, if possible, said to the Head himself. Like a gentleman, he fought face to face and spurned all intrigues. And as the fight went on he found gradually that he was enjoying a tussle with an opponent after his own heart; and when that had been acknowledged he soon began to like the Head himself.

The struggle with Max and his party was sharp,

but it was not long, and it left no bitterness behind it. That the Head won it so quickly was due in part, at any rate, to the fact that his antagonists had taken it for granted that their loyalty to Granby was infinitely greater than his. But when they discovered that they were dealing with a man who treated Granby as if it was a human being, and who was ready to toil half the night on behalf of it, the chief weapon in their armoury was taken away from them. The Head ceased to be regarded as a new broom with an excessive desire to sweep merely for the love of sweeping, and began to be looked upon as a man who, however misguided he might be, was genuinely trying to do his best for Granby.

With such a man there were only two things for Max and his friends to do: either they must resign and leave the Head a free hand, or they must stay and be loyal to him. As 'sportsmen,' they could not remain where they were and plot against him; and as none of them really wanted to leave Granby, they fought their fight, and, having been beaten, they threw up the sponge with a grace that did credit to the discipline they had learned as athletes.

A hole-and-corner party, however, remained and pin-pricked the Head on every possible occasion. Under Dr. Manning each master had been a law unto himself, he had never been interfered with, and he could be as inert as he liked without being even in danger of a rebuke or a warning. To men of this torpid type Mr. Challoner was as unpalatable as an inquisitive hornet. He buzzed around their ears, and if he did not move their energies into the right direction, he at any rate succeeded in arousing anger instead of lethargy. With these men the Head did not profess to have much patience; they had either to arouse themselves and do as he wished or they had to go;

and most of them went, but not before they had shown their resentment in being suddenly deprived of most comfortable positions.

Often, indeed, during the beginning of his rule at Granby did the Head feel that the mountains of difficulty in front of him would never be removed, for he was not old or experienced enough to know that such a work as he had set out to do must take years before the results of it could be fully seen.

Encouragements, however, came to him, and the greatest of them was that before his second term was completed the School Debating Society, which had been in a fading and almost moribund state, was a flourishing institution.

Recognizing that it was impossible to revive this society unless he was supported by the popular boys of the school, he summoned a carefully chosen band of bloods to his house, and told them both what he wanted them to do and why he wanted them to do it.

Ormsby and Joe were among the boys who attended this meeting, and what the Head told them reminded Joe forcibly of what Mr. Boyd had said on that Sunday morning years before. As he listened to the Head, Mr. Boyd's advice came back to him; but if the actual words were very much the same, the difference between the men who spoke them was tremendous. Mr. Boyd had seemed to Joe to call for an effort not because it could be successful, but because it was a sin not to make it. He was a 'decent old boy,' Joe had thought, but even when he was intensely in earnest he had not the power to be inspiring. But the Head infected you at once with his own enthusiasm and determination; it had been nice enough to listen to Mr. Boyd and very soothing, but to hear the Head talking was so stimulating that it was actually perturbing.

Not for a moment had he attempted to minimize the importance of games, but he pleaded with the bloods to allow some other interests to come into their lives. 'Not, if you like,' he had said, 'as a substitute, but as an addition to your other interests. You have got to go out into a world which is not restricted by bounds and boundaries, and you have got to think about some of the duties that face you when you get there. Believe me, debates are not dull unless you want to make them so; I want to see the first two hundred of the school discussing leading questions in the Big Classical once every week, and I want the junior boys in the houses to have their own debating societies in which they will not be too nervous to speak. I ask you to help me in carrying out this idea, and I promise you that every effort shall be made to make the debates amusing without making them frivolous.'

'I should never dare to say a single word,' Ormsby had declared to Joe when they had left the meeting.

'It will be rather different from the Pow-Wow, where everyone rots from beginning to end,' Joe had admitted.

But Max unexpectedly gave his support to this part of the Head's scheme, and Ormsby screwed up courage enough to speak at the first meeting held by the Debating Society in the Big Classical. Joe, however, never got further for three weeks than a small twitching in his legs. To himself he delivered fierce orations about 'Conscription,' 'Home Rule,' and 'Imperial Federation,' but when the time came to deliver them he was smitten with a paralyzing desire to remain in his seat. In a sense he enjoyed those debates, but at the same time he suffered mental tortures during them. For on each occasion he had made up his mind to speak, and then had left the

Classical without having said anything except 'Hear, hear.'

At the beginning of the Head's second term both Ormsby and Joe had been promoted to the Upper Sixth, and the latter's proeses had on two occasions been received with a special word of praise. There was no longer any chance to do what they called 'a real old slack,' but although Ormsby grumbled frequently, he was in reality enjoying the experience of being 'up' to a man who simply made him work whether he wanted to or not. In the first weekly orders he had been invariably above Joe, for Joe still occupied some of his time for preparation in pursuits that Ormsby described as 'mad,' and which certainly prevented him from being a successful collector of marks. For the time being Ormsby was a zealous worker, while Joe only worked hard at the subjects that interested him; the rest he scamped as much as possible, and turned aside to read books and reviews, which Ormsby always threatened to throw out of the window.

In spite of some fears that the Head would eventually 'jump' upon him for sins of omission, Joe was superlatively happy in these days. The fortunes of the Rumbold business had taken a turn for the better, and Mr. Rumbold had cast aside depression without becoming so formidable a parent as he had previously been. There was no disguising the fact that athletically Joe was a disappointment. 'Not quite a hopeless failure,' his father described him, 'but a keen source of regret.' But if Joe was not likely to add to the glory of the family, he had at least won a few cups for running and was not quite such a 'hopeless duffer' (Bingo) as he had seemed likely to become. He had in fact been accepted as a misfortune by his father and brothers, though, owing to his good nature and

good spirits, only a minor one. Even Pads considered that Joe's place in the family was settled, and Mrs. Rumbold alone retained a hope that he would eventually, and in some unwonted manner, surprise Maiden Croft.

But the way in which Joe was to bring about this surprise had not become clearer to Mrs. Rumbold as the terms had passed by. He had moved steadily up the school, but his reports (if they were to be trusted) had not encouraged her to think that he was either very industrious or very clever. Average intelligence he evidently possessed, but she was troubled that he did not seem to possess the ambition to be discontented with mediocrity. She had wished ardently that Joe should be happy in his home, but as soon as her wish had been granted she knew that what she wanted for him was something more than mere contentment and happiness. So she had looked forward to the change of headmasters at Granby, and hoped that Joe would be stimulated by it, but at first his letters scarcely contained any references to Mr. Challoner. When asked point-blank how he liked the new Head, his reply was: 'I dare say he will be all right when we get used to him.' There was not much satisfaction to be got from such an answer as that, but such as there was Mrs. Rumbold had to be content with it.

Later on, however, Joe spoke and wrote more freely of the Head, and Mrs. Rumbold's hopes began rapidly to brighten. The traditions of the Rumbolds were against betraying enthusiasm for a master, even if they happened to feel it, but Joe had never been entirely subject to the traditions of his family. No sooner had he passed into the Upper Sixth than his letters ceased to be filled with acute and rather amusing comments on current Granbeian events, and be-

gan to contain very little that did not either directly or indirectly refer to the Head. That Joe, who was generally so loth to show his affections, should suddenly cast off this cloak of reticence and proclaim his loyalty to a master was a source of the profoundest joy to Mrs. Rumbold.

Then, again, Ormsby's zeal for work was a real happiness to Joe. Not for a single moment did he regret that this zeal had placed Ormsby above him in the weekly orders. Ormsby, he considered, was bound to rise to the top of everything, if he would only give himself a chance and not make annoying little dashes towards destruction. No longer was Ormsby an anxiety, for in a half-comical, half-serious way he had taken the new Head under his wing, and was 'running' him for all he was worth. Sherwood, Arkwright, and Piper were practically left alone and forgotten, for Ormsby had fallen under the spell of the new Head and had no time to spend in bullying or gambling.

Granby, in Joe's opinion, was a most glorious place, and the only tiny fly in his ointment was that he could not screw up courage enough to face the large audience in the Big Classical. In his own language, 'It seems so rotten to feel as if I had things to say and not to have the pluck to say them.' He admired enormously Ormsby's audacity in opening his mouth, even if he could not save himself from secretly criticizing the arguments that came out of it.

The Debating Society had, the Head saw, 'caught on,' but all the same he was not entirely satisfied. Unless something was done at once, he recognized that the same boys would speak on every subject, and that the silent ones would soon cease to listen. On the morning after the discussion on 'Imperial Federation,' he told Joe to wait and speak to him 'at

twelve,' and Ormsby, overhearing this command, asked Joe what was 'up.'

'I don't know, except that I've been slacking a bit the last two or three days,' was the answer.

That anything except rebukes could come from an interview with the Head never occurred to Joe. If anyone had told him that he was one of the boys from whom 'much' was expected, he would merely have grinned and disbelieved. He did not think that much of a row was in front of him, but he did anticipate trouble of some kind.

'Just go to my room and wait. I'll be there in two or three minutes,' the Head told him, when the Sixth had been dismissed from their class-room.

To find himself the sole occupant of the Head's private room was such a strange experience that Joe's first impulse was to laugh when he entered it. Quite vehemently he wanted to sit in the Head's chair, and to imagine that he was dispensing justice to a row of culprits standing before him. To be found in such a posture was not, however, altogether prudent, especially as the outlook was already squally. So he repressed his desire, and having looked carefully round the room, with a morbid curiosity to see where the canes were kept, he wandered to the window, and stayed there until a knock on the door interrupted his meditation.

'Come in,' he replied at once, and a very chastened-looking Piper entered.

'Halloa!' Joe exclaimed.

'What on earth are you doing here?' Piper asked.

'I'm blown if I know; I'm waiting.'

'I've been caught cribbing by that beast Anderson.'

Joe whistled, and Piper held up a note.

'The beast,' he said, 'has written this to the Head. When is he coming?'

'Here he comes,' Joe whispered.

In less than a minute the Head had tossed the note on to his table, and had told Piper to come to him at five o'clock. 'Now,' he added, as the door closed, 'sit down, Rumbold. Why don't you speak at our Debates?'

A vivid blush at once spread over Joe's face, and for the life of him he could not speak until he had recovered from this unexpected question.

'It is a very great pity,' the Head continued, 'for reasons that I will tell you. Undoubtedly you could be more valuable in the school if you would not remain so much in the background; I have brought you here to ask you to use the influence you have.'

There was no mistaking the genuineness of Joe's amazement, and the Head smiled directly at him. 'Take some time to think over that,' he said, 'for I have been thinking about it for some weeks.'

For a moment Joe looked as if he was on the point of speaking, and then the symptom passed away. He was not nervous any longer, but he was so exceedingly embarrassed that his mind seemed to be turning perpetual somersaults.

'Modesty,' the Head continued, almost as if he was speaking to himself, 'can be cultivated until it becomes something very like a crime.'

'I don't think I'm modest, sir,' Joe managed to blurt out, and the Head looked at him with smiling eyes.

'If you were self-consciously modest I should not be talking to you,' he said. 'But I think you will agree with me that you are naturally more inclined to follow than to lead, and that possibly this desire comes from not wanting the trouble of leading.'

Joe put his head slightly to one side and considered this.

‘I think that’s true, sir,’ he replied.

‘But is it right?’

The question came at once, and Joe floundered in answering it.

‘I don’t think I’m made to lead; I’m not that kind of fellow. I know heaps of fellows who like bossing things, but I don’t, sir. I’ll try to speak at debates if it’s any good; but I’m hopeless at putting my foot down. I sort of get cramp in the knee whenever I try,’ he said.

‘That is almost precisely what I expected you to say, though from the style of your essays I expected that you would express it rather differently. But, Rumbold,’ the Head added, ‘you know that the plain meaning of it all is that you are trying to avoid responsibilities.’

Joe nodded. There was no denying the truth of this statement, but he did not feel at all inclined verbally to corroborate it.

‘Then again,’ the Head continued, as if that matter was settled, ‘I am going to ask you to work much harder than you do at present. I don’t want you to cram, but anyone who has watched your work in class, as I have, must know that you take a very liberal view of how little need be done when the subject does not interest you.’

For the first time Joe smiled back at Mr. Challoner. To be ‘found out’ was honestly a delightful sensation, for had not the Head made and announced this discovery it would have been impossible to have believed completely in his sagacity.

‘I read all sorts of things; I do waste time,’ he said.

‘I am not at all sure that you have wasted your time, for your essays show that you have been reading widely, and that you remember a great deal of what

you have read. But I think you will now have to restrain yourself, and tackle with all your might the work you are told to do.'

'Yes, sir,' Joe agreed.

'It will be a big sacrifice,' the Head remarked.

'Oh, I don't know, sir,' Joe mumbled.

'Don't make any mistake about that; it will be. Broadly, when a boy has been pleasing himself and suddenly finds that he has to please others, the change is bound to be difficult. But it is very difficult indeed when the change means that he has to stop reading books that he likes, and has to apply himself to subjects that he considers dull. I am not speaking without experience.'

'Then why did you change, sir?' Joe asked.

'Because I was marked down, as you are marked down, to get a scholarship.'

Joe possessed the art of looking excessively astonished, and he used it to perfection.

'We won't cram you any more than can possibly be helped, but a very wise man has said that 'Higher Education is, in England, what the Universities choose to make it,' and there you have one of the difficulties of public-school masters in a sentence. With your ability to write essays and proses you have a big start. With a reasonable amount of application to the subjects you do not care for, you ought to get a Balliol scholarship next December. Will you try hard, and come to me for encouragement when you feel despondent about it?'

'I'll try, and I'll come. I expect I shall be always coming, for—for—— Well, sir, it seems to me rather a large order.'

'That's better, at any rate, than saying it is an impossible one,' the Head said as he stood up. 'But I believe you will see the sense of it when you have

thought about it.' Don't look upon me as a perpetual thorn in your side, but as one who wants you to do big things and believes you can do them. I will help you all I can, and try to see that your work is made as interesting as possible. I should have liked you to be the next editor of the *Granbeian*, but I am afraid that you will not have the time to spare for it.'

* * * * *

As Joe walked back to the house he met two panting Maxites returning from a training run.

'You promised to come with us,' one of them said.

'I'm awfully sorry, but I clean forgot all about it,' was the reply.

'You'll never win "the Stourford" unless you train.'

'Oh, I'll train all right, there's heaps of time,' Joe said, and went into the house wondering what Ormsby would think of the Head's latest idea. Ormsby, however, after one exclamation of surprise, promptly declared that the Head was 'a real nailer.'

'He knew,' he said, 'that you would come back and spout all this to me, and that if you made up your mind to get a Balliol "schol," I'd have to get one, too. He's as cute as blazes.'

In his anxiety not to arouse Ormsby's jealousy, Joe had made light of his interview with the Head, and had been most careful not to place any emphasis upon the friendly way in which it had been carried on. But although he was glad that Ormsby was not envious, he could not help wondering if the Head had been quite as 'cute' as Ormsby considered him. In his own mind Joe was not at all sure that the Head had ever thought about Ormsby, but it was extremely convenient—if also a little surprising—that Ormsby should be convinced that he had.

From that day Ormsby worked more zealously than ever, though in the summer term his labours were more than a little interrupted by the fact that he got into the School Eleven.

Joe, meanwhile, pursued his 'career of mediocrity,' as Max in impatient moments named it. He was second in the Stourford Run, got the School Essay Prize (which pleased his mother), and was the strenuous if not very capable wicket-keeper of the Twenty-Two.

During the summer holidays it had been arranged that Joe should stay with Ormsby for a week, and then Ormsby was to go back to Maiden Croft with him.

CHAPTER IV

FATHERS AND SONS

BEFORE the summer term had ended, Ormsby's enthusiasm both for work and the Head showed signs of waning. Max's had again won the First House Challenge Cup, and though Ormsby professed to deplore the fact that cricket was interfering with his work, he was also furiously angry when the Head stopped two members of the School Eleven from playing in an important match because they were candidates for Woolwich.

No longer could it be said that the authorities of Granby cared for nothing except games; but in removing this reproach the Head received protests from most unexpected quarters. 'My boy,' the father of one of the Woolwich candidates wrote, 'tells me that his cricket is being seriously interfered with. This would not have happened in Dr. Manning's time, and your sense of justice will convince you that I ought not to suffer from changes in which I was not consulted, and of which I do not approve.'

Other letters in the same strain reached the Head, but he was quite unperturbed by any of them. Games he believed in thoroughly and encouraged, but they were, as long as he ruled Granby, going to be secondary to the reasons for which 'Pious John King' had founded the school: 'To soundly instruct boys in

the knowledge that will make them citizens of the world, to teach them the control of their tempers which alone can ably fit them to be rulers of men, to constantly remind them that their first duty is to God and their second to their neighbour, and their third to the school to which they temporarily belong.'

So John King had written in a very long document, which was preserved under a glass case in the Granby library; and if in the exuberance of his soul he had written rather more than was required, and in a style at which editors of the *Granbeian* had learned to scoff, there was no getting away from the soundness of his advice.

Apart from games, Ormsby had another grievance against the Head, and it was that, once having begun to preach to them, he had proceeded to pour forth too many sermons and sermonettes. Ordinary week-day chapel could no longer be considered a time for mental and physical repose, but was often occupied almost entirely by a short sermon to which one could not save oneself from listening. It was bad form, Ormsby declared, of the Head to be constantly rubbing in the fact that he was a good preacher. 'What he says is all right,' Ormsby told Joe, 'but I'm blowed if he ought always to be saying it.' Others, more influential than Ormsby, thought the same thing; and Max, outspoken as ever, warned the Head that he was making a great mistake.

'They will listen to you once a week, but when it comes to a spate of sermons, you will find that you are upsetting their digestions,' he said.

'They don't show any signs of it yet. I will promise to stop as soon as they do not listen,' was the reply.

'They scuffle more than they did.'

'It seems to me the only possible way to keep in touch with so many boys,' the Head returned, 'and

though it may seem to you an egotistical thing for me to say, I do feel that the more they know what is in my mind, the more use I shall be to them. I can't get really to know all of them, but all of them can know me ; and if there is anything in me that can help them, I feel that they ought to be given it.'

He believed that most public-school boys would naturally be more religious if they could be taught not to be afraid of the jeers of the scornful, and his object was to instil a spirit of friendliness into religion, without introducing the familiarity that breeds contempt. It was, he knew, a difficult, if not an impossible task, and it was made the more difficult because of the limited vocabulary used by Granbeians. 'No one,' a headmaster, whom Mr. Challoner admired, had written, 'would try to talk about Communion with God, or home affection, or any other sacred and intimate thing, if he could use no other terms of approbation except "top-hole," and the like, without feeling a fool.'

Nevertheless the Head persevered with his task, and Ormsby was almost inclined to forgive him, because in most respects he seemed to understand 'what a fellow is made of.'

'I'm about seven-eighths sinner and one-eighth saint ; there's no sort of middle about me,' Ormsby declared to Joe, 'but the Head seems to think I'm about half and half—like shandygaff.'

'He told me yesterday he was jolly glad we were going to be together some of the holidays,' Joe replied.

'Why does he always say these things to you? He hardly ever talks to me, except about enclitics and things like that.'

'I'm blowed if I know. You'd better ask him.'

It was by no means the first time Ormsby had

shown his jealousy of Joe's friendship with the Head, but on this occasion it passed off at once.

'We'll give him fits ; we will simply work like mad,' he said.

'But we won't overdo it ; we must have some fresh air,' Joe replied.

'We can work out of doors. We will clear all the bugs and blackbeetles out of our summer-house, and send them to that idiot Arkwright to be stuffed, or whatever he does with the things.'

During the fortnight that Joe spent with Ormsby, it may be truly said that the latter worked with a total disregard for exercise and for his guest.

'I'm not going to stuff in that summer-house during the afternoons ; I simply can't,' Joe said at luncheon on the third day of his visit.

'Never mind,' Ormsby said. 'I dare say I can work all right by myself. It won't be the same thing, but I'll worry through.'

Mr. Ormsby gave a short laugh, and helped himself to salad.

'I'm sorry,' Joe said ; 'but I should only fidget about if I came. I feel as if I must climb trees, or swim, or something.'

'You had better leave Philip to himself, and come for a walk with me,' Mr. Ormsby suggested.

'I'd like to awfully,' Joe replied ; but he also felt more than a little alarmed at the prospect, for Ormsby was looking across the table at him with a 'you've been and done for yourself now' expression.

And the first walk was, Joe thought, a dismal failure, his only consolation being that he could not possibly have said anything very foolish, because, apart from saying a few 'Yesses' and 'Noes,' he had not opened his mouth.

'You are through with that job,' Ormsby assured

him, 'for my father samples people as walkers, and hardly anyone gets an encore. What did you talk about?'

'We scarcely talked at all.'

Ormsby laughed. 'You're as safe as a church,' he declared.

So on the next afternoon they were both astonished when Mr. Ormsby said, 'I shall be ready, Joe, at half-past two. We will go up Ledburrow Beacon. You will see one of the finest views in the kingdom.'

'Golly!' Ormsby exclaimed, when his father had left the room. 'You're regularly clean in for it. Get your adjectives ready. Superb and wonderful are no use. He takes people to the top of Ledburrow just to find out what they will say; but most of them are so out of breath when they get there that they simply sit down and pant.'

Presumably Joe passed this test, for the climb up Ledburrow was the second of many walks that he and Mr. Ormsby took together, and at the end of a fortnight Joe wondered that he had ever been scared to silence by the companionship of this quietly humorous and interesting man.

'My father,' Ormsby said, as he and Joe were travelling to Maiden Croft, 'ought to be ashamed of himself, for he has been taking you away from work while I've been slaving and getting ahead of you. It's not the game, when you come to think of it; but it all helps me.'

'Rot,' Joe replied, 'I did as much as I could remember. Are you going to have any holidays now?'

'None,' Ormsby said emphatically; 'but I'll have to spend some time in getting the right side of your father; whenever he sees me at Granby, he always looks as if he remembered that tea at Mother Bloomfield's.'

‘He will forgive you everything for making ninety-three and getting nine wickets against Cliborough,’ Joe told him.

Very soon after they arrived at Maiden Croft, it was abundantly evident that Joe had made a true prophecy. However much Ormsby’s athletic fame was ignored in his own home, there was no mistaking that at Maiden Croft it made him a most welcome guest. At dinner on the first evening of his visit Mr. Rumbold spoke to him frequently, and most obviously approved of him.

‘A little foreign-looking, but an athlete and a gentleman to his finger-tips; a most excellent friend for Joe,’ was Mr. Rumbold’s verdict on him; and when Mrs. Rumbold reminded him mischievously that he had once been prejudiced against Ormsby, he replied: ‘Quite so, my dear; but Granby has made a different boy of him. It has taught him respect for his elders, and a thousand other things.’

No sooner, however, was Ormsby in an atmosphere in which games were talked of and played from morning to night, than he began to show that Granby had failed to teach him one thing, at any rate, and that was the value of perseverance. As the days passed by he worked less and less, and at last even jeered at Joe for working so steadily.

Ormsby, in fact, had been received by Mr. Rumbold, Flip, and Bingo as a distinguished Granbeian athlete, and in a week was more at home in Maiden Croft than Joe had been in his life.

Sometimes he would be seized with spasms of conscience, and go to Joe’s bedroom and arrange a programme for the following day; but when the morning came, he was overwhelmed by an irresistible attack of ‘Rumboldery,’ and went off with either Flip or Bingo to play some game.

In a sense it was a pleasure to Joe to see how extraordinarily happy Ormsby was at Maiden Croft, but it was impossible also not to contrast Ormsby's previous opinion of Bingo with the one which he now obviously held; and the change, Joe thought, was not in Bingo, but in Ormsby.

'If I had been born an Ormsby, and Philip a Rumbold, you would have been saved a lot of trouble, mother,' Joe said to Mrs. Rumbold.

'And lost a lot of happiness,' she added, and Joe said no more.

He knew that his mother was hoping for great things when he went up for a Balliol scholarship during the following term, but he was too distrustful of himself to speak about his chances of success.

'I wouldn't take a hundred to one about myself,' he had told Pads, when the latter had returned from playing cricket for the county; 'but it is no use to worry mother by telling her so.'

'I'd rather make two ducks against Yorkshire than that you shouldn't get one of the things, Joe,' Pads had answered.

'It's a blessing we don't seem to be as hard up as we were,' Joe said.

'I believe the governor still spends more on this place than he ought to. I know mother wants him to give it up.'

Joe whistled, and then said: 'You think it would really be some use if I got a "schol"?''

'I'm certain, or he wouldn't let Jumpy live in lodgings, and me teach small boys what I am only just beginning to learn myself. Just give me that coat; we are about ten minutes late for dinner already.'

They hurried down to the dining-room, and would

have been rebuked for their unpunctuality had not this been the last evening of Ormsby's visit.

'I suppose,' Mr. Rumbold was saying as Joe sat down, 'that you will be head of the house next term.'

Ormsby looked across the table at Joe. It was a certainty, he thought, that this honour was in store for him, but it was scarcely for him to say so.

'Of course he will,' Joe said at once; 'he's simply made for it.'

'And what are you made for?' his father asked.

'To back him up when he wants it; but he won't,' Joe replied.

'I envy both of you,' Mr. Rumbold said; 'you are going to have the happiest year of your lives. And if you, Joe, can get into the Eleven and the Fifteen, you will also make us very happy.'

Compared with some of the tirades to which Joe had listened in the past, this little statement was so mild that he could only say, 'Thank you, father; of course, I'll have a shot.'

'If I'd been captain of the Fifteen, Joe would have been in it already,' Ormsby declared; 'but now a fellow called Sherwood, in our house, is scrum-half, and a jolly poor one too.'

'If I leave here to-morrow morning, what time do I get to Bradford?' Pads asked suddenly.

'What are you going to Bradford for?' Bingo said.

'What do you think?'

'If it's to play against Yorkshire, the match is at Sheffield,' Bingo announced; and during the laughter that followed, Pads winked gaily at Joe. When, in his opinion, it was prudent to change the conversation, Pads knew that he had only to draw attention to his besetting sin of vagueness, and the deed was

done ; and the trick was as successful as ever on this occasion.

Both Pads and Ormsby left Maiden Croft on the following day, and when Ormsby's letter of thanks arrived, Mr. Rumbold considered it to be a perfect specimen of its kind. 'I never knew what a really good time was until I came to you,' was one of the assertions that Ormsby made ; and Mrs. Rumbold smiled when she read it.

'He's rather a nice boy really,' she said to her husband ; 'but he has not begun to find himself yet. He has got a lot of trouble in front of him.'

'Not half so much as Joe has,' was the reply. 'Philip takes what he can get, and is thankful for it. And his manners are now charming. It is impossible to believe he is the same boy who was so insolent to me at that tea-party.'

Mrs. Rumbold, however, saw no difficulty in believing this, though she did not say so.

A week after Ormsby had returned to his home Joe went down with unaccustomed punctuality to breakfast, and found his father sorting the letters. 'Here's one from Philip for you, Joe. What does he say ?' he asked.

'It's rather bulgy,' Joe replied, and two minutes afterwards had pushed the letter into his pocket.

'Well, what does Philip say ?' Mr. Rumbold asked again before the *Times* was propped in front of him.

'Oh, he's all right ; he's been working again. They've been having topping weather.'

'If that's all he has to say he needn't have stopped working to say it,' Mr. Rumbold declared ; but Joe volunteered no more information, and having eaten his breakfast at express speed he went into the garden. There, on a sunny bank, he produced the bulgy letter, and began to study it.

‘DEAR JOE’ (it began),

‘I’m an ass, and Max is a bigger. Just look at the tosh he’s just sent me, and what he says. I was an absolute fathead to leave the stuff about; I meant to take it home, and left it lying on my table. I’ve written to Max to try and soothe the man a bit.’

‘Yours,

‘P. O.’

Then, having finished this, Joe picked up Max’s letter.

‘DEAR ORMSBY,

‘The enclosed was found by me on your table, and as I saw that it referred to me I took the liberty of looking at it. I can only imagine that you began it some years ago, for it seems to me a peculiarly childish composition. There is not, for instance, such a noun as “coerces.” I, however, regret greatly that any boy in my house should amuse himself so foolishly at my expense, and my regret is the keener because you occupy an important position, and ought to have a greater sense of the fitness of things than to keep such mischievous rubbish in your possession.’

‘He’s in a most awful bait,’ Joe said to himself, and picked up the fragments of the ‘Life of Max’ which Ormsby had enclosed in his letter. The first pages were devoted to little rhymes, and Joe gasped after he had read two of them :

‘There once was a baby called Max,
Who was born with the heart of Ajax.
His brothers and sisters,
He covered with blisters,
Until they beseeched him for “Pax.”

‘His squadrons of nurses tried threats and coerces,
But none of them mattered two dimes,
For Max from his cot
Took control of the lot,
And gave them the thinnest of times.’

‘This is just the sort of stuff that would make Max furious,’ Joe thought, as he glanced through the rest of Ormsby’s verses.

In turn Max was made to rhyme with tin-tacks, syntax, backs, wax and whacks, sacks, lax, cracks, and knacks ; but, with a firm intention to look on the bright side of what he had read, Joe could find nothing that he could honestly call encouraging.

Almost desperate at Ormsby’s carelessness in leaving these effusions where Max could find them, Joe put down the rhymes and picked up a sheet that was headed (in red ink) :

LIFE OF MAX THE GREAT

CHAPTER I

HIS INFANCY

Then, changing from red to black ink, the biographer had set out on his task, and had very soon become tired of it. But what he had written was in itself more than enough to account for Max’s wrath.

‘As is usual with very great men,’ Ormsby had begun, ‘Max’s ancestry is clouded in obscurity. He is believed to have been descended almost directly from the sons of Anak, and to have some Amazonian blood in his veins. That, however, is a surmise which you may reject or accept as you will. What is more certain and of greater interest is that Max at the age of two won the first prize in the Bath

and West of England Baby Show, and was awarded a special diploma of merit for his biceps. Famous, then, almost from his cradle, nothing has happened since to dim the lustre of his career. It may not be out of place to give an abbreviated list of the successes he had gained before he was ten years old.

‘Peterborough Infant Exhibition, 1868. Special Bottle and Bib for casting the javelin.

‘Olympic Games (held at Oundle in 1870). First prize in Mile race for babies under five years of age. Laurel wreath for wheeling his nurse three times round the track and upsetting her at the end.

‘Marathon Races held at the Newmarket Spring Meeting in 1872. Disqualified for boring his nearest rival to tears by tales of his own prowess.

‘1874, at the Amalgamated Meeting of the Athletic Association of Lusty Babies. First prizes for Throwing the Discus; Hop, Skip, and Jump; Threading the Needle (open to ladies); and Climbing the Greasy Pole.’

Here the ‘Life of Max,’ which Ormsby had talked about so often and wasted so many sheets of paper upon, came to an abrupt finish, and Joe’s state of mind when he finished reading it can only be described as chaotic.

Possibly in some moods he might have laughed at some of Ormsby’s nonsense, but now he was so wholly occupied by trying to imagine what Max would think of it, that he was very far from smiling.

Not, however, until he returned to Granby did he discover how grievously Max had been offended, and then, to his astonishment and dismay, he found that all of his belongings had been moved to the room invariably occupied by the boy who was head of the house.

CHAPTER V

FORTUNE'S WHEEL

MAX passed through much vexation of spirit before he finally made up his mind to pass over Ormsby and to choose Joe as head of the house. During all the years in which he had ruled over Oakshotte, he had clung resolutely to the belief that the best athlete in the house was naturally the fittest boy to be the head of it. And if Ormsby was to be passed over, Max did not blink at the fact that he was departing from his general rule. As an athlete, Joe, with his amazing habit of just missing the highest honours, could not be compared with Ormsby, who was in both the school Fifteen and Eleven. Besides, Ormsby evidently liked to rule, while Joe did not seem to be eager either to possess authority or to exercise it.

Until Max had discovered his 'Life' he had regarded Ormsby as the natural successor to Temperley, and had, moreover, been convinced that he would be a most keen and vigorous one.

But the ribaldry and disrespect contained in Ormsby's verses had upset him so completely, that the most contrite apologies had failed to appease him. And then, while he was trying to bring himself to take a more lenient view of the offence, he received a letter from the Head, to which a post-

script was attached : ' In case it should make any difference to you in choosing a head boy for your house, I had better mention that next term Rumbold will be Senior Prefect of the School.'

At first Max proclaimed to his wife that it was like the Head to interfere in things that were no concern of his, and in racing language Joe went out for a whole day to odds of 100 to 1 (offered) against him for the head-boyship. But after Mrs. Max had pointed out that Mr. Challoner would have been guilty of discourtesy if he had not mentioned this decision, Max answered, ' I wish, my dear, that you would occasionally admit that Challoner makes a mistake ; I detest these perfect people,' and had gone out for a long walk.

During this walk he swished off the heads of several thistles with his stick, and came to a decision ; but he did not write to Joe and say what was in store for him. And even when the holidays were ended he was still worried by the thought that he had rejected the right boy for inadequate reasons, and had pinned his faith to one who might from sheer good-nature allow the house to go to rack and ruin.

Although Joe had scarcely ever discussed the matter he had always taken it for granted that Ormsby would be Temperley's successor. That was, indeed, the arrangement that both of them wanted, and Joe, even after reading the ' Life of Max,' had not imagined that it would be upset. Now that he found himself chosen in place of Ormsby his first impulse was to be riotously angry with Max.

' If it was likely to be any good I'd go and talk to him, but he's got the hump,' Joe muttered to himself, and closing the door of his room with a kick he sat down on the nearest chair.

Without doubt it was a nice room, easily the largest

and most comfortable in the house, and whoever had arranged his pictures had, he thought, far more taste than he had.

'It's jolly comfortable, but it's all no use when I shall always feel as if Ormsby ought to be here,' and then his fit of the glooms was interrupted by Sherwood.

'I didn't expect this,' he said.

'More did I. What's more, I didn't want it,' Joe replied, and moved quickly to avoid a descending pat on the back.

'All the same nearly everyone in the house will be jolly glad; they like you a jolly lot better than Ormsby,' Sherwood continued, and at the same time upset Joe's temper.

'I wish you'd stop saying that sort of thing to me; I hate it, and I hate you when you talk such rot,' he said.

'All the same it's true, they'd rather have you than Ormsby,' Sherwood persisted.

'It isn't true; and if it is, the only reason is that they think I shall be slack and Ormsby will be keen.'

'If it comes to that, why be slack?'

'Because I've heaps to do without jawing to Max whenever he wants to jaw to me. I suppose I ought to be jawing to him now.'

'Ormsby will be pretty sick,' Sherwood said.

'And quite right too. You'd be sick if you were in his place,' Joe replied, and went on to tell him that unless he could stop gloating over Ormsby's misfortunes he had better clear out of the room.

But the difficulty with Joe was that he never could be rude enough to convince Sherwood, and they were still talking when Ormsby burst into the room, and looked both surprised and angry at seeing them together. Max had cut him off as he had arrived, and

after a long interview he had come straight to Joe to congratulate him. But Sherwood's presence nipped his good intentions in the bud.

'You've soon made yourselves comfortable in here. May I come in?' he asked sarcastically.

In reply Joe stood up and pushed him into a chair, but until Sherwood left the room it was impossible to think of anything to say.

'He soon bolts when I come,' Ormsby remarked before Sherwood had closed the door.

'This is a most confounded nuisance; Max is madder than usual,' Joe remarked.

'While you have been talking to Sherwood I've been talking to Max.'

'What did he say?'

'He's climbed down as far as he could. If you think I'm sick because he's chosen you, you're miles out. What I'm sick about is that you will go hobnobbing with Sherwood. He's the sort of saint who likes everyone else to get into thousands of rows, so that he can hug himself and think how good he is. He's jolly careful about his own fat conscience, but he doesn't care a rap about anything else on earth. His proper place is in a frame or under a glass case in some mouldy museum, but he isn't alive enough for this place. He's a desiccated mummy, and not worth preserving at that.'

'You will feel ever so much better now that you've had your usual first evening of term explosion,' Joe told him.

'I shall never feel any better until Sherwood is wiped off the face of the earth. He's clammy,' Ormsby declared.

'I don't believe he can be both desiccated and clammy, but it doesn't matter. He's a bit of a fraud, for he isn't half as nice as he looks,' Joe said, and

Ormsby was so mollified by this confession that he proceeded to make arrangements for the coming term.

Through the succeeding weeks Max had no reason to complain of his new head-boy, even if there was no cause to be enthusiastic about him. With Ormsby's assistance Joe managed the house satisfactorily enough, and though he suspected that Piper was amusing himself disreputably, he was far too much engrossed by his work to worry about fellows who did not actively worry him. If this pestilent clique was ever to be crushed, the obvious time to destroy it was after he and Ormsby had been up to Oxford.

With unflagging energy both Ormsby and Joe laboured until the beginning of December, but whereas the former's work did not interfere greatly with his games, Joe's ability as a football player quite clearly deteriorated. Max groaned loudly that the last of the Rumbolds was not going to get his School Fifteen colours, but Joe—though sorry to disappoint his father—could not be brought to join in these lamentations.

The thing that was really troubling him was the result of the scholarship examinations, and when the time approached for him and Ormsby to set out to Oxford, the contrast between the nervousness of the one and the self-confidence of the other was even greater than Mr. Challoner had expected it to be.

'There is no doubt which of those two boys is the better scholar,' the Head told Mr. Boyd, 'but if either of them gets a scholarship I should not be at all surprised if Ormsby is the one.'

'Rumbold may be quite cool when the examination begins, but a good deal depends with a boy of his temperament on the first paper,' Mr. Boyd said.

‘I know, and I have told him to send me a wire.’

‘Good gracious, you do look after them!’ Mr. Boyd said.

‘Rumbold is worth looking after, for I believe he will do something eventually, though his horrible modesty may prevent him from doing it soon enough.’

‘Soon enough for Granby?’

The Head smiled. ‘We aren’t getting on so very badly, are we?’ he asked.

‘We are getting on very well, but a Balliol scholarship would, if it does nothing else, give me a most pleasant excuse for writing to William Rumbold.’

‘He pretends to laugh at the idea of a cousin of his getting a scholarship,’ Mr. Challoner said.

‘William is inclined to laugh at nearly everything and everybody; it is the habit of these very modern men,’ was the reply.

On the following afternoon, while Mr. Boyd was taking his class, the school-porter brought him an opened telegram: ‘Did, I think, not so frightfully badly; Ormsby did very well.—RUMBOLD.’ And scribbled in pencil underneath it was: ‘Characteristic and hopeful.—H. C.’

Subsequently, however, Joe’s reports from Oxford were anything but sanguine about himself, and when he returned to Granby he refused stolidly to hold out the faintest hope of his success.

‘The best of the whole thing,’ he said to Sherwood, ‘is that it’s over. Ormsby did a lot better than I did, but he says he muckered up one paper altogether. I muckered pretty well the whole lot.’

Ormsby stretched himself in Joe’s easiest chair and groaned.

‘Oxford,’ he declared, ‘is simply a ripping place if you haven’t got to mug over rotten exam. papers. There were smugs in that hall who looked as if they

had never seen a football in their lives, and they scribbled for all they were worth, while Joe and I sucked our penholders. I've sucked enough penholder during this week to last me until I die. Armistage asked us to breakfast; he's at Magdalen; and I'd rather go there than to Balliol any day. Joe and I have arranged to go to Magdalen together.'

Joe had, as a matter of fact, arranged nothing, but he did not take the trouble to contradict Ormsby. The consciousness of complete defeat was possessing him, and he wished that Sherwood and Ormsby would go out of his room and leave him to himself. He knew now that he had been hoping that success in this examination would atone for all that he had failed to do at Granby, and he felt that he had been building on the very sandiest foundations. Both at work and at games he was a failure, and he wanted time to take stock of himself and think what was to happen in the future.

On the following day he came to the conclusion that he had better leave Granby at the end of the term, and get his own living. But how was he to get a living? This problem beat him altogether, and he decided to place it at once before his mother.

'There's a fellow in the house whose brother is fruit-farming in California (I think), and there are mounted police all over the place. I want to get out and do something. It's hopeless staying here and muddling on. What had I better do? I'll hate to leave, but it will only be a sham to stay here until the end of the summer, and I might get started before then.'

To this letter Mrs. Rumbold did not reply immediately, and Joe at once began to wonder whether she was too disgusted with him to write. But, on the evening of the day on which he had expected an

answer, he met Arkwright in the house library, and was told that someone had been shouting for him.

‘What did he want?’ Joe asked, and sat down to look at the *Sphere*.

‘He’s got a telegram for you; I think it was taken to your room; I hope none of your people are ill,’ the Infant answered gloomily.

In a moment the reason of his mother’s silence flashed through Joe’s mind. Of course she was ill, and that would ‘top-up’ everything. Before leaving the library he turned over some pages of the *Sphere* without seeing them, and then he jumped up and rushed to his room.

The telegram was lying on his table, and for several seconds he stood staring at it. His mother must be ill, otherwise she would have answered his letter, but until the telegram was opened he would not know how ill she was. And then he made a dash at the envelope and tore it open.

‘My warmest congratulations,’ (he read) ‘and I hope your father’s and mine are the first to reach you. We had a wire directly the list was out. Please sympathize with Philip for me. I have torn up your last letter. Am coming over to-morrow.—MOTHER.’

Standing by his table, Joe read through his mother’s message twice, and then walked to the window and read it three times more. Already he knew it by heart, but that did not prevent him from sitting down and reading it again. And, having done that, he got up and looked to see if the envelope was really addressed to him.

‘I’m blessed if I’m not going dotty,’ he murmured; ‘of course it’s addressed to me. But perhaps there has been a mistake.’

The possibility of a mistake having been made engaged his attention for a minute, but before he had begun to realize what his success and Ormsby's failure could mean, Sherwood had rushed into the room and was shaking him by the hand.

'I ran into Max as I came into the house,' he said, 'and the Head has just sent him a note. Here's one for you, too. Max wants to see you. I wish I'd got here before you got that wire. My stars, what a time you'll have now. Nothing to do, while I've got to grind for Woolwich !'

'Where's Ormsby ?' Joe asked.

'He's not in yet ; he's having tea at Mother Bloomfield's with Piper. I'd like to hear old Max congratulating you ; he'll be funnier than a waggon-load of monkeys.'

Feeling, as he described it afterwards, as if 'he did not belong to himself,' Joe entered his house-master's study, and was promptly clapped on the back.

'I tell you honestly,' Max said, 'that I never expected this, and I'm willing to admit that the Head has scored a point. The lesson, I suppose, is that what's one Rumbold's meat is another Rumbold's poison.'

'I expect that's it, sir,' Joe replied, and began to smile. What meat and poison had to do with the matter he did not understand, but that Max was trying to be enthusiastic and failing in the attempt was extremely obvious—and humorous.

'I'm glad to see you smiling again, for during the last few days you have been looking more melancholy than a cat with a cold. I don't like to see the head of my house taken up solely with his own concerns. Not,' Max added, 'that this is a time for anything but congratulations.'

For several minutes, however, Joe was detained, while his housemaster struggled to work himself up to an appropriate state of enthusiasm ; but a shower of cold water seemed to descend upon, and mix itself with, all his attempts at congratulation. Try as he would, he could not forget that although he had anticipated success for Joe, it had been of a very different kind from that over which he was now striving to rejoice. But there was still time for part of his anticipations, at any rate, to be realized, if only Joe would take himself in hand and determine to succeed.

With ' You have still a chance to win the Long Stourford and to get into the Eleven ' ringing in his ears, Joe at length got back to his room, and found Ormsby waiting for him.

' You are a fraud, Joe ; you always do keep things dark, you told me you had done rottenly,' he said at once.

' So I thought I had ; I can scarcely believe it now. I'm most awfully sorry that——'

' Oh, I don't want any blooming pity to be shed over me. If only one of us was to do any good, of course I'm glad you're the one. What difference does it make ? ' Ormsby asked, and having jerked himself out of his chair he walked to the window.

' It won't make any, not a row of pins' difference,' Joe declared, but he did not feel as certain as he pretended to be.

Success was the food upon which Ormsby had been living, and although he had taken his first rebuff without many expostulations, Joe was beset by the fear that this second reverse might send him to Arkwright and Piper for various forms of diversion. And before the Easter term was a fortnight old, Joe knew for certain that Ormsby was attacked by his passion for

excitement, and was gratifying it in ways that would have to be stopped.

With all his powers of argument and persuasion, Joe tried to prevent him from pestering Arkwright and from being friendly with Piper.

'You were always shoving the Infant down my throat, and looking after him when we first came here, and now you scare him to death and——'

'I never touch him,' Ormsby interrupted.

'But all the same you bully him.'

'Because he's all groans and blubber; and when he gets angry you should hear what he says about this place. He declares we are all a set of top-hole bounders, who think of nothing but food and games. When he's in a bait he's funny, but when he's in his usual rotten state he's just a walking lump of misery.'

'I believe he will bolt or something unless you leave him alone.'

'Well, let him bolt, it's the best thing he could do; he would have done something worth talking about for the first time in his life.'

'I'd much rather Piper bolted,' Joe said.

'He's not the kind that bolts,' Ormsby replied, and laughed noisily.

'It might prevent him from being sacked if he bolted.'

'What the blazes do you mean, Joe?'

'That unless he stops playing cards in his room, I am going to stop him. That young fool Newman owes him over thirty bob.'

'What does it matter to you? That's Newman's and Piper's business.'

'It's also mine and yours,' Joe declared.

'And Sherwood's. He's a school-prefect; don't forget that,' Ormsby sneered.

'You and I can manage Piper.'

‘If you think I’m going to be roped into this, you are jolly well mistaken. I’m not out to turn this place into a sanatorium for babes and sucklings; it’s dull enough already.’

And then Joe made his last appeal.

‘Look here, Philip,’ he said, ‘if you were in my shoes, I’m blowed if I would go back on you. And I don’t believe you are going to make this job any harder than it is already. I simply hate it now.’

‘Then leave it alone,’ Ormsby said promptly.

‘I mean I hate tackling Piper, but he can’t be left to screw money out of silly asses like Newman. If you are going to take Piper’s side, I shall still go on with it; but it will be about a thousand times viler.’

Ormsby sat for some time without speaking, but he was in a deeper mess than Joe suspected.

‘I should leave it alone if I were you,’ he said, and as he was leaving the room he added: ‘Don’t forget we are playing the Bonhamites at three o’clock to-morrow afternoon,’ for he and Joe were the House Fives Pair, and had to play the Bonhamites in the semi-final round of the cup.

‘It’s a certainty,’ Max said to Ormsby during dinner on the following day; ‘but don’t give anything away. There’s a lot of luck at Eton Fives. I like the plain, hard-hitting game without any stupid buttresses.’

‘We can beat the Bonhamites all right, sir,’ Ormsby answered; and when dinner was over he walked off with Piper, while Joe, who was house-librarian, and had been neglecting his duties, went to his room to make out a list before he had to change. In a few minutes he discovered that he must go to the library if the list was to be useful, and as he walked up the passage he met Arkwright.

'Why don't you go out and do something?' Joe said, and thought that the Infant looked more woe-begone than ever.

'What is there to do in this hole?' he replied.

'You'll go cracked if you don't buck up a bit,' Joe said.

'I've gone cracked, and I *am* going to do something,' Arkwright replied, and passed on.

Joe looked back at him for a few seconds, and was vaguely anxious. 'I really believe he is cracked; I wonder what he's going to do,' he said to himself, and then went into the library.

Two or three boys were in the room when he entered it, but they soon disappeared, and when he went back to his room to change the silence was a proof that the house was empty. And then, as he was taking off his coat, his eyes fell upon a bulky packet with the words 'Please open' written upon it.

'What the blazes is this?' he said, and obeyed the instructions.

Inside the packet were two letters—the one addressed to himself, the other to Mrs. Arkwright.

Tearing open the first, he read: 'DEAR JOE,—You have always behaved more or less like a human being to me, so I am writing to let you know that I have decided to score off Ormsby and end all my troubles this afternoon. I am going to drown myself in the Stour, and I know a deep place where I can do it quite comfortably; it's just by Pendlesham Bridge, and perhaps you wouldn't mind telling them, so that they shan't have much bother in finding me. You know I can't swim, so it will be one plunge and then . . . Good-bye.'

As Joe finished this extraordinary document he ran his hand through his hair, and unconsciously swore out loud. Then he looked at his watch, and

saw that he was due at the fives-court in twenty minutes.

‘It’s two miles to Pendlesham Bridge; and he’s got half an hour start; I must simply bolt after him!’ Joe exclaimed. ‘He’s as mad as a hatter.’

Rushing into the passage, he shouted the name of every fag he could think of, but no one answered him. Clearly every boy had left the house, but the boot-boy might still be lurking in the dim regions where he spent his days. At top speed Joe dashed down the stairs and shouted in vain. ‘How on earth am I to send word to Ormsby? I know, I’ll ring Max’s bell and ask a servant,’ he said, as he ran back into the passage; but this idea had scarcely occurred to him when he saw how dangerous it was. If Max was in, he would want explanations, and by the time they were given Arkwright might have committed suicide, and Ormsby might be for ever branded as the cause of it.

‘I could tear up my letter, but he’s probably told his mother too. Anyhow, I’ve got to bolt to Pendlesham, and have a shot at saving the fellow,’ Joe thought, and, hoping to meet someone who might take a message, he hurried from the house.

The road, however, to Pendlesham was directly away from the school; moreover, it was almost immediately out of bounds. So, after one frantic look round for a messenger, Joe gave up the search, and started to race to the bridge. Before he had gone half a mile a church clock struck three, and reminded him that a crowd would be already waiting round the fives-courts.

‘Of course he’s cracked—of course he’s cracked,’ he kept on repeating to himself, and went on to find other excuses for Ormsby’s share in this miserable business. Actual pity for Arkwright he had none,

or very little. If a fellow was silly enough to throw himself into a river, you had got to try to save him, but he wanted jolly well kicking all the same. Only the fellow happened to be a bag of bones, and mad at that. 'You couldn't kick a skeleton,' was Joe's last thought as he came in sight of Pendlesham Bridge, and a few seconds later saw Arkwright sitting under a tree and calmly reading a book. And at the sound of footsteps the Infant looked up and placidly smiled.

'I wondered whether you'd come,' he said. 'I wanted to see if anyone cared a button about me.'

Then Joe, who had run himself to an absolute standstill, uttered one furious exclamation, and put his hands to his sides and his head nearly to the ground.

'Didn't you ever intend to chuck yourself in?' he asked when he had partly recovered.

'I might have; I don't know. Anyhow, I'm glad you came,' the Infant said almost gaily.

'Do you know that I've missed playing in the Fives Challenge Cup against the Bonhamites, and that Ormsby and a crowd of other fellows are waiting for me now? What do you say to that?'

'What does a fives cup matter? You've saved my life,' the Infant replied.

'I'd a good mind to chuck you into the river; that's what you jolly well deserve. Can't you see what a mess you've made of things?'

'How?' Arkwright asked, with exasperating composure.

'Well, what am I to say when I get back?'

Arkwright pondered over this question for a while, and then said: 'If you tell them the truth, I really will poison myself or something.'

'And a good job too,' Joe told him; and the Infant at once complicated the situation by bursting into tears.

For some time Joe walked round him, prodding him gently with his foot, beseeching him to pull himself together, alternately abusing and comforting him. But Arkwright was one of the most accomplished weepers in the world. In turn he sobbed, cried, groaned, heaved, and finally he snivelled, but until he reached the snivelling stage there was no hope of making him face the situation.

While, however, he was abandoning himself to this orgy of grief, Joe set to work to think about the immediate future.

'If I don't tell them what you wrote and why I came here, you have got to go,' he said.

'Go where?' the Infant asked helplessly.

'Why, home as quickly as you can. You aren't fit to be at school; your nerves are all wrong, you want feeding up and someone to look after you.'

'That's what my mother says,' Arkwright wailed.

'Well, tell her so at once. To-day's Wednesday; I'll give you until Saturday, but if you haven't gone by then I shall say what I've been doing, and all that you have gone through up to now will be a picnic compared with what you'll get. We can't have fellows in our house committing suicide all over the place. It isn't *done*.' And as Joe finished, he could not save himself from smiling.

'If you sneak, I shall say Ormsby drove me to it.'

'And who will believe you?' Joe asked.

'Some fellows will; anyhow, it will be beastly for him.'

For a few minutes the Infant seemed more inclined to make things unpleasant for Ormsby than to save himself, but eventually it was agreed that he should write to his mother and say that he was too ill to stay any longer at Granby, and that Joe should

not give a true report of what had happened until the Infant had departed.

Joe, however, was not an expert in making bargains, and on this occasion he had made even a worse one than usual. To avoid suspicion, Arkwright entered the house alone, and he was safely in his room when Joe arrived to find himself face to face with a cluster of fellows, who asked him in the plainest language what he had been doing.

It was a natural enough question, but Joe, intent on dealing with Arkwright, had not realized how difficult it would be to answer.

'Something altogether unexpected turned up. I am most awfully sorry for keeping everybody waiting,' he said.

'That's all very fine,' Ormsby stood before Joe and replied; 'but what was it?'

'Yes; what was it?' came in a chorus.

'I can't tell you now.' And then, turning to Ormsby, he added quietly: 'Don't keep on asking; I'll tell you some time.'

'I want to know now,' Ormsby said in a loud voice; 'you made all of us look absolute fools, and you should have heard all the Bonhamites jeering. They say they are going to claim the match.'

'Such a thing has never happened before,' Piper called out.

'And probably never will again,' Joe added; and, passing slowly through the crowd, he was vividly conscious of the storm of bitterness that he had raised.

He had, in fact, been the most popular boy in Max's when he had left it, and on his return he had been met by furious faces and the fiercest criticism. At tea a faint murmur ran through the hall as he went in, and, thinking that to stay until nearly everyone had finished would look like 'funking,' he soon got up

from his seat, and was followed to the door by something very like a volley of hisses.

'I'm bang up against it,' he said to himself as he went back to his room; but the idea of explaining things at once to Ormsby, and so relieving the situation, did not even occur to him. He had made a bargain with the Infant, and meant to stick to it whatever the consequences were. Scarcely, however, had he sat down when Sherwood joined him.

'Look here, Joe,' he said, 'you're in for a bad time. I've just come to say I'll stick to you if you will only explain things.'

'It's jolly good of you, but you'd better leave me to myself for a bit. You'll only mess things up worse, but—thanks awfully,' Joe replied, and pushed him towards the door.

'Can't you say what's up? Fellows naturally——'

'I know,' Joe interrupted; 'but I can't yet.'

Sherwood went away slowly, but Joe was not to be left without another offer of friendship, and this one came from a most surprising quarter and had no conditions attached to it.

In answer to a heavy thump on the door, Joe shouted 'Come in,' and Cole lurched into the room.

'I thought you'd about jump out of your skin when you saw me,' he began.

'What's up now?' Joe asked.

'Well, it's like this, Joe; if I can manage to blurt it out. I've always thought you were a bit of a worm really, sort of friends with everybody, too blooming fond of being popular for my taste. All smiles and no inside worth speaking about. I said ages ago—I've never forgotten it—that some day I hoped you'd be worth having a fight with, but I never expected you would be. Now I think that you are.'

This was the queerest way of making a challenge

that Joe had ever heard, but then Cole had always been more or less of a lunatic, who was never happy unless he was playing football.

'I can't very well fight to-night,' he answered; 'it's a bit awkward altogether, but if you wait I'll try to bring it off. I've got about as much as I can get through just now.'

'You are also the Senior School-Prefect,' Cole reminded him.

'That's true, but if you really want to have a go——'

'But I don't,' Cole roared, and burst forth into a tempest of laughter.

'What on earth do you want, then?' Joe asked.

'Why, to tell you I'm on your side. The way you looked at those fellows in the passage got me. I know a funk when I see one. I thought you'd back down, and you didn't. It was pretty beastly for you both then and at tea, and you went through it top-hole. That's what I came to say, and now I've said it, I'll go.'

Joe was too amazed to thank him, but his next interview was less surprising and infinitely more unpleasant. Summoned to Max's study, he was told to give explanations of his extraordinary conduct, and when he failed to answer this command he was most roundly abused.

'To-morrow morning I shall move Ormsby into your room, and you will no longer be Senior Prefect of my house,' Max told him at last, and then added: 'What are you smiling at?'

'I didn't know that I was smiling, sir,' Joe answered.

'It's my firm belief that all this work has turned your brain. It isn't the first time, remember, that I have asked you to explain your conduct, and that you have refused to do so. Now go.'

As Joe left Max's study, the thought suddenly

occurred to him that if only he was to be in charge of the house for that evening he must deal with Piper at once, or for ever hold his peace. He was already in a tight corner, but even to make it still more tight was better than to sit down and think. Besides, the Head had constantly reminded him of the danger of neglecting responsibility, and if he was to take any notice of that warning no time was to be lost. And above all was a desire for battle, an irresistible craving to settle matters before the reins were taken out of his hands.

He went into the library for two or three minutes, and the two fags who were reading the papers scowled at him, looked at each other, and promptly disappeared.

'I'm getting used to this sort of thing,' Joe thought, and started off gaily to his great attack.

His only anxiety now was that Piper would not be in what was known in Max's as 'The Den of Thieves,' but as he stopped outside the door he heard Ormsby say, 'No trumps,' and Piper reply, 'I double no trumps.'

For a moment he hesitated; somehow or other he had forgotten that Ormsby would be present at this attack. 'It's a confounded nuisance,' he muttered; 'but here goes.'

Without knocking he opened the door, and before he was inside the room Piper had asked him, in scorching language, what he wanted.

'I'm going to stop you from bagging money from fellows like that and that,' Joe replied, and pointed at the luckless Newman and the equally unfortunate Harker.

'Oh, clear out,' Ormsby said, and turned his back on Joe.

'I'm going to clear this lot out first,' Joe said, and

seizing one pack of cards he threw it into the blazing fire.

Whereupon Piper jumped to his feet, and poured forth a volley of profanity as he jumped.

'Take that,' Joe said; but his attempt to give an open-handed smack on his cheek missed its mark, and, falling on the side of Piper's nose, produced a ridiculously hollow sound. It had, however, the effect of bringing matters to a crisis, for Piper hurled himself at Joe, and was instantaneously lying on his back on his own floor.

'I'll finish this fellow off if you will all go,' Joe said; and Newman and Harker at once sought safety in flight. Ormsby looked at the struggling Piper for some time, and then shrugged his shoulders.

'I'll settle with you for this, you see if I don't,' he said to Joe, and swaggered from the room.

The next quarter of an hour may truthfully be described as the most disagreeable time Piper had ever endured. A coward by nature, he cringed most disgustingly when he was cornered; but, although he was quickly reduced to a supplicating mass of groans and whimpers, no exhilaration could be obtained from squashing such a poltroon.

Why he had been allowed to go on so long was the question that troubled Joe as he screwed information from him, and found that Ormsby was no less than £7 15s. in debt. Such a 'knock-out' as that wanted dealing with at once, and as soon as Piper had been finished off Joe went straight to Ormsby's room, and found it filled with a babbling crowd.

'Make yourselves scarce,' Ormsby said to them; 'Rumbold and I have heaps to square up.'

'The first thing you had better square up is the £7 15s. you owe Piper,' Joe replied, as soon as they were alone.

‘Supposing you mind your own business for once ; here’s the beastly money,’ Ormsby answered, and, diving his hand into a drawer, he produced two five-pound notes, four sovereigns, and two half-sovereigns.

‘Where did you get all that from ? ’ Joe managed to ask.

‘I didn’t steal it. As a matter of fact, half of it is yours, though I’d rather give it to a Home for Decayed Frogs than to you,’ Ormsby declared, and he pushed half of the money across the table.

Joe, however, merely stared at it.

‘As you have a right to know how I got it, I’ll tell you ; and then we’ve done, and you can let Sherwood hang on to you, as I always said he would. Look there,’ Ormsby said, and pointed to a bare piece of wall.

‘I can’t see anything,’ Joe replied.

‘No ; but there used to be something.’

‘Was it William’s picture ? ’ Joe asked, and looked round the room.

‘It wasn’t your rotten cousin’s picture ; it was by that fellow Rudesheimer, or whatever his name is, after all. Newman’s father was here last week, and spotted it ; and I sold it to Maggs, the picture-dealer in Broad Street, this afternoon, when you cut playing the Bonhamites, and won’t say why.’

‘But,’ Joe said, ‘if William didn’t really paint it, we’ve sort of swindled old Wedberg. I told him I knew William painted it.’

‘Wedberg’s dead, and his shop’s shut up—been shut up for ages. Is that good enough for you ? ’

Joe supposed that it was, and Ormsby continued : ‘If you hadn’t played such a low-down game this afternoon, I should never have sold the thing without telling you. But you’ve always kept things dark, and I’ve done with you.’

'Not yet,' Joe said, and, leaving the money on the table, he went out of the room.

Until Mrs. Arkwright arrived on the Friday evening, and insisted, in spite of Max's expostulations, on removing the Infant there and then, Joe went through a sea of troubles. He had never wanted to be head of the house, but there was no disguising the fact that his removal from that position came at a most unfortunate time. For two days he was openly scoffed at in Max's, and while he was going through this time of misery, he realized also that no boy except Ormsby must ever have the facts of the case explained to them.

'If they ever find out that the Infant threatened to chuck himself into the Stour, they will stick it all down to Ormsby, and he will get it nearly as hot as I've had it,' Joe decided.

But when the Infant had disappeared from the place for which he was never fitted, Joe went to Ormsby's room, and, without any concealment, stated exactly what had happened during the previous Wednesday.

'But why didn't you tell me?' Ormsby kept on asking; but it was a question Joe did not answer until he was pressed again and again.

'I suppose,' he said at last, 'that it was because I knew you had got into the habit of going for him, and thought you would have another go.'

'And you were thundering well right,' Ormsby exclaimed; 'I was an absolute beast to him.'

'It's all over now,' Joe said.

'No, it's just begun,' Ormsby replied; 'you've saved me from a million things. Supposing the Infant had . . .'

'I don't believe he ever meant to. That was the only funny bit in it.'

‘And—oh . . . what a blighter I’ve been ! I must tell everybody.’

‘You promised not to. It’s rough on the Infant too.’

Ormsby jumped up, and roamed restlessly about the room that had been Joe’s, and protested as he roamed.

‘I must tell your people, the Head and Max,’ he declared ; ‘I shall never feel half clean until they know. Then I can make a fresh start.’

‘All right,’ Joe said. ‘I would rather like my father and Max to know, for they will give me a fairly thin time until they do.’

* * * * *

Speech-day at Granby during the following summer was attended by what Thomas Lee (the keeper of the Big Gate, and aged seventy-three) declared to be a record crowd. ‘There were a sight of people here in ’82 and ’83, but there’s a bigger sight to-day,’ he said.

From far and wide Granbeians had gathered together to show their love for the old school, and to rejoice over its reviving fortunes. And of all the visitors who sat in the Big Classical and listened to the list of honours that had been won during the year, no one was prouder than Mr. Rumbold. Sitting by the side of his wife, he beamed upon her and upon all who were sitting near him. He had, in fact, appropriated this day to himself, and Mrs. Rumbold could scarcely conceal her amusement.

‘Joe seems to be the most popular boy in the school,’ he said. ‘I like to hear the name of Rumbold cheered like that. And it sounds almost better in a room. What was it the Head told us this morning about Joe and Philip ?’

‘Only that during the last term and a half they have been such friends that no one else can get a chance to speak to them,’ Mrs. Rumbold replied ; but tears of

thankfulness were swimming in her eyes, and she wanted to sit silently and watch Joe go up for his second prize.

'There was more than that. Didn't he say that he wished every house in the school had two boys like Joe and Philip to look after it?'

Mrs. Rumbold answered with a nod, for Joe's name had again been called.

'He will want the luggage-cart to take all these books home; I never expected to sit here and see a son of mine get more prizes than he can carry. I suppose we owe something to Challoner. But,' he continued, 'I wish schoolmasters wouldn't talk to me about these classical fellows as if I ought to know all about them. When the Head mentioned Pylades and Orestes, I'm bothered if I didn't think they were a brace of islands until you gave me a hint.'

During the remainder of the prize-giving he yawned repeatedly; for, after Joe had appeared for the last time, his interest in the proceedings was at an end.

'I want to get out of this and watch the cricket,' he said, but when the function had finished and he was steering Mrs. Rumbold from the Classical, so many congratulations were showered upon them, that he was in the best of good spirits when he found Joe and Ormsby waiting in the Quadrangle, and talking to William Rumbold.

'I think, Joe,' he said, 'that without any very un-British display of emotion I may be allowed to shake your hand. I'm afraid you will never get a Blue at Oxford, but all the same it may be worth while to send you there. And I shouldn't be at all surprised if your mother thinks the same.'

There was a twinkle in his father's eye which Joe noticed and understood, but William prevented him from speaking.

‘That was only meant to score off me, Joe,’ he said.

‘Not altogether,’ Mr. Rumbold declared ; ‘for I think cricket the best game in the world, and cricketers some of the best fellows in it. I have forgiven you, William ; but the sooner you clever young men stop jeering at everyone and everything, the better it will be for England. Unless you can be enthusiastic about something or somebody, your tongues will become permanently glued to your cheeks. And you might remember that an athlete is not necessarily a fool.’

‘I have never——’ William began ; but Mr. Rumbold did not wish to listen to any excuses, and at once turned to Joe and Ormsby.

‘I am sure,’ he said, ‘that you two agree with me.’
And their reply was : ‘Rather.’

THE END

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